# “I Might As Well Be Human. But I’m Not.”

## Focalization and Narration in Ann Leckie’s *Imperial Radch* Trilogy

Roosa Töyrylä
Master’s Thesis
Master’s Programme in English Studies
Faculty of Arts
University of Helsinki
May 2020

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

| Tiedekunta – Fakultet – Faculty | Koulutusohjelma – Utbildningsprogram – Degree Programme | |
|---|---|---|
| Humanistinen tiedekunta | Englannin kielen ja kirjallisuuden maisteriohjelma | |
| Opintosuunta – Studieinriktning – Study Track | | |
| Tekijä – Författare – Author | | |
| Roosa Töyrylä | | |
| Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title | | |
| "I Might As Well Be Human. But I'm Not.": Focalization and Narration in Ann Leckie's *Imperial Radch* Trilogy | | |
| Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level | Aika – Datum – Month and year | Sivumäärä– Sidoantal – Number of pages |
| Pro gradu -tutkielma | Toukokuu 2020 | 59 |


Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tutkielmani käsittelee fokalisaatiota ja kerrontaa Ann Leckien *Imperial Radch* -trilogiassa. Trilogia on lajityypiltään tieteiskirjallisuutta ja avaruusoopperaa, ja sen päähenkilö Breq, joka toimii myös kertojana ja fokalisoijana, on ihmiskehoon istutettu tekoäly. Erityisesti keskityn tutkielmassani siihen, miten teosten muodolliset ominaisuudet liittyvät yhteen päähenkilön identiteetin kehityksen kanssa.

Analyysini lähtökohtana toimii Brian McHalen huomio, että spekulatiivinen fiktio voi kirjaimellistaa narratologiassa käytettyjä käsitteitä. Lisäksi hyödynnän Monika Fludernikin luomaa kokemuksellisuuden käsitettä eli ajatusta siitä, että fiktiivisen teoksen tapahtumat eivät ainoastaan tapahdu vaan myös koetaan. Kuvaan teosten fokalisaatiota ja kerrontaa pitkälti Shlomith Rimmon-Kenanin käyttämään termistöön nojaten.

Analyysini osoittaa, että trilogian ensimmäinen osa muuttaa kertojan kaikkitietävyyden kirjaimelliseksi, kun taas kaksi jälkimmäistä osaa hyödyntävät kirjaimellistettua vaihtelevaa sisäistä fokalisaatiota. Molemmat ilmiöt ovat yhteydessä siihen, miten inhimillisyys ja ei-inhimillisyys yhdistyvät Breqin hahmossa, ja kerronnan ja fokalisaation muotojen kehitys heijastaa päähenkilön identiteetin ja ihmissuhteiden kehitystä. Fokalisaation ja kerronnan muodot eivät siis ole vain teosten muodollisia ominaisuuksia, vaan ne ovat suoraa seurausta sisällön kehityksestä, ja niiden seurauksia käsitellään temaattisella tasolla myös itse tarinassa.

Myös muut teosten kerronnalliset elementit ovat tiiviissä yhteydessä sisältöön. Ensimmäisen romaanin kahdessa eri ajassa etenevä juoni korostaa Breqin menneisyyden ja nykyisyyden eroja. Epäluotettava kerronta puolestaan luo viivettä ja siten lisää lukijan mielenkiintoa, mutta epäluotettavuus yhdistyy myös juoneen ja henkilökuvaukseen sekä tekee päähenkilöstä inhimillisemmän ja samaistuttavamman.

Trilogiassa käytetään englannin *she*-pronominia sukupuolineutraalina, mikä on yhteydessä fokalisaatioon ja päähenkilön kokemusmaailmaan mutta haastaa myös lukijaa kyseenalaistamaan sukupuolen roolia yksilöiden luokittelussa ja määrittelyssä. Teokset kyseenalaistavat sosiaalisia kategorioita yleisemminkin, erityisesti inhimillisen ja ei-inhimillisen välistä jakolinjaa sekä Breqin hahmon kautta että sarjan kolmannessa osassa myös juonen tasolla.

Tutkielmani osoittaa, että *Imperial Radch* -trilogia auttaa näkemään narratologian käsitteitä uudella tavalla ja myös haastaa vallitsevia käsityksiä, sillä esimerkiksi teosten fokalisaatio on poikkeuksellisen kompleksista ja joustavaa. Kyseessä on siis monitahoinen sarja, joka tarjoaa haasteita niin lukijoille kuin teoreetikoille.



Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
Ann Leckie, amerikkalainen 2000-luvun tieteiskirjallisuus, fokalisaatio, kerronta

Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited
Keskustakampuksen kirjasto

Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information

## Table of Contents

**List of Abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| *AJ* | *Ancillary Justice* |
| *AM* | *Ancillary Mercy* |
| *AS* | *Ancillary Sword* |

## 1. Introduction

As of yet, and as far as we know, conscious machines, robots, or other forms of artificial intelligence do not exist. Indeed, it is an open question whether such entities could ever exist, and the answer would probably depend on what we in fact mean by consciousness. The realm of fiction, however, is quite different from actual reality. For example, Ann Leckie's *Imperial Radch* trilogy has a protagonist that is an artificial intelligence, or AI, called Breq. Breq is also the narrator and the main *focalizer*, the point of view character, of the story. This renders the discussion whether she as an artificial construct can have a consciousness or not somewhat pointless. If we accept Breq as the teller of her own story, she must be conscious. As Monika Fludernik writes, narrative always implies the protagonist's consciousness (22). It could be said that this is especially true of a focalizer: when we get more or less direct access to a character's consciousness, it becomes unnecessary to ask whether that consciousness exists or not. Neither is the consciousness of AIs an issue in the story: they are taken to be conscious as a matter of fact, just as they are understood as having feelings. Their opinions or emotions just do not matter very much to most human characters.

Therefore, the question at hand in the trilogy is not whether an artificial intelligence can be conscious or possess an identity. Rather, it engages itself with what such a consciousness and identity could be like. In narrating Breq's story, and those of the characters around her, the novels explore the limits of identity and personhood, as, for example, the extent to which the mind and one's sense of self are separable or inseparable from the body. These themes have previously been studied by Hanna-Riikka Roine in her PhD thesis where she uses *Ancillary Justice* as one of her case studies, but while Roine approaches the novel through its worldbuilding, I study the trilogy mainly through the narratological concepts of *narration* and *focalization*. Thus, this thesis is an exploration of how questions of identity are represented in the novels through their focalization and narration, how the narrative form and content become entangled in the trilogy, and what consequences this has for the identities of the characters, particularly the protagonist Breq.

*Ancillary Justice*, the first novel of the *Imperial Radch* series, received wide acclaim when it was first published in 2013 and became the first novel to win the "Triple Crown" of science fiction, consisting of the Hugo, the Nebula, and the Arthur C. Clarke Award (Silver). It was the debut novel of the American author Ann Leckie, who had previously published only some short stories, and was followed by two further novels to

complete the trilogy, *Ancillary Sword* in 2014 and *Ancillary Mercy* in 2015. One of the most prominent features of the series is that the feminine third person pronoun is used for all characters, except when the characters talk in some other language than the default Radchaai. This is reminiscent of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, where only the masculine pronoun is used, but has a different background in the storyworld: unlike the people on Le Guin's Gethen, the Radchaai are not biological androgynes, gender just does not play any role in their society. For practical reasons and for the sake of consistency, I also use the feminine pronoun for all characters, even if there are a few exceptions where a character's sex can be inferred from the text. I also follow the novels in designating *Justice of Toren*/One Esk and the other AI characters by the pronoun *it*, whereas Breq is a *she*, even if she technically speaking is not a human being. The other characters in the novels, however, mostly think of her as a human, initially because they do not know her true origin, but later on also because they genuinely see her as a person.

Because of its themes and characters that question the boundary between human and nonhuman, the *Imperial Radch* can be approached in the light of *posthumanism*, the various aspects of which are illuminatingly discussed by Pramod K. Nayar. First of all, posthumanism can simply refer to an ontological condition: humans living "with chemically, surgically, technologically modified bodies and/or in close conjunction (networked) with machines and other organic forms," but also, importantly, to "a new *conceptualization* of the human" (13, emphasis original). This "vision of the human" itself has two different manifestations, which Nayar terms *transhumanism* and *critical posthumanism* (16–19). Transhumanism refers, to put it simply, to the belief of improving the human through technology (16). Critical posthumanism, on the other hand, rejects the human exceptionalism that transhumanism ultimately relies on (16–17, 19). Rather, critical posthumanism treats the human "as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology" (13). Drawing on twentieth-century critiques of humanism, critical posthumanism regards the notion of human as socially constructed, and hence, there are "no *essential* features of the human subject" (46, emphasis original). Unlike most of the earlier critiques, however, it maintains that traditional humanism not only "exclud[ed] variant human bodies, races, genders and ethnicities" but that "the category of the human was constructed by expelling the animal, the plant and the machine" (46–47). Thus, critical posthumanism is "a whole new conceptualization of the human as a more inclusive, non-unitary entity whose boundaries with the world, with other life forms and species, are porous" (47).

The Radch empire, the main setting of the *Imperial Radch* trilogy, is in itself a posthuman society: both in the ontological sense, due to the fact that it is common for people to be physically augmented, but also to some extent in a more critical sense as the genderless society could be seen as going against the male centeredness of traditional humanism. In many ways, however, the Radchaai seem to be advocates of transhumanism rather than critical posthumanism. In fact, as further discussed later on, their view of the human is distinctly rigid and narrow. The novels do not, however, only portray the Radchaai ideology but also challenge it, starting from the fact that Breq is the series' narrator, thus giving a voice to that which is viewed as distinct from human, as the Other. Furthermore, the story itself has parallels with the posthumanist discourse. This is evident especially in *Ancillary Mercy*, the final novel of the series, which thematizes the malleability and constructed nature of social categories. I will return to this theme, as well as the Radchaai view of the human, further on in section 4.2.

In what follows, I first give a brief synopsis of the novels and then move on to discuss the major theoretical underpinnings of my thesis. In chapter 2, I first analyze *Ancillary Justice*, the first novel of the series, through the concept of omniscience and then proceed to study its focalization. Both of these subsections focus mainly on the storyline of the novel that is set further in the past. In the third subsection of chapter 2, I take a closer look at this dual storyline structure. In chapter 3, I move on to analyze the two further novels in the series, *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy*, focusing mainly on their focalization. In the first subchapter, I look at the formal characteristics of focalization in the novels, while the second subchapter connects focalization to the plot and themes of the novels. The analysis in chapter 4 covers the entire trilogy and focuses on phenomena that relate to how the information presented to readers is limited. There, I first analyze aspects of unreliable narration in the series and then the role of gender and other social distinctions, as well as their relation to focalization.

## 1.1 The *Imperial Radch* Trilogy

*Ancillary Justice*, the first novel of the *Imperial Radch* trilogy, starts with an initially nameless first person/homodiegetic narrator finding someone barely alive in the snow on a remote planet. Later it is revealed that the narrator, known as Breq, is the last surviving fragment of a warship called *Justice of Toren*, destroyed twenty years ago. Breq is not a human soldier but an ancillary, also known as a "corpse soldier," an AI inhabiting what was

once a human body. Therefore, she is to all appearances a human being, but her consciousness is in fact artificial. The person Breq saves from the snow is Seivarden Vendaai, once a lieutenant aboard *Justice of Toren*, now a drug addict that has spent the last thousand years in "suspension," which in effect makes her a time traveler from the past. Seivarden ultimately decides to stick to Breq, her unlikely and unwilling savior. The further developments of the relationship between the two include Breq knocking Seivarden unconscious, saving her life again by jumping off a bridge after her, and Seivarden becoming Breq's servant.

Breq's story unfolds on two levels: in the more recent storyline, she is on a revenge mission, trying to obtain a gun made by an alien species called the Presger. The gun is possibly the only thing that can pose even a remote danger to the ultimate ruler of the Radch empire, Anaander Mianaai, whose consciousness is spread among dozens of cloned bodies. The storyline set further in the past reveals Breq's motivation for revenge against the Lord of the Radch: Breq was once not only *Justice of Toren* but *Justice of Toren* One Esk, a "decade" of the ship consisting of twenty ancillary bodies. One Esk and its favorite Lieutenant Awn Elming inadvertently find out that the Lord of the Radch is not a single being anymore but is secretly at war with herself. The more conservative part of Anaander Mianaai opposes the more progressive half that has, among other things, prohibited the production of ancillaries. Mianaai suspects Awn of supporting the other half of herself and orders *Justice of Toren* to execute her. *Justice of Toren* follows the order, but this causes it to break down emotionally and turn the gun against Anaander Mianaai herself. Mianaai on her part then destroys the ship, with only one ancillary, *Justice of Toren* One Esk Nineteen, later known as Breq, managing to escape.

At the end of *Ancillary Justice*, Breq confronts Anaander Mianaai at Omaugh Palace and is able to force Mianaai to acknowledge her own plurality. This causes an open fight between the factions of Mianaai on the station and, as the conflict spreads, effectively leads to a civil war. The more reform-minded Mianaai gets the upper hand on Omaugh, adopts Breq into her house, and makes her Fleet Captain, or, as Mianaai puts it, her armed and independent conscience.

At the beginning of *Ancillary Sword*, Mianaai sends Breq to protect the Athoek System, and Breq grudgingly agrees after hearing that Athoek Station is where Lieutenant Awn's sister lives. Breq sets out with the human-crewed ship *Mercy of Kalr*, with Seivarden as one of her lieutenants. Problems arise even before the ship arrives at the station: it turns out that the young Lieutenant Tisarwat is actually Anaander Mianaai who has replaced Tisarwat's consciousness with her own. With the help of the ship's medic, Breq removes the implants

that Mianaai used to hijack Tisarwat's brain. This effectively gives birth to a new person: the flighty teenager Tisarwat used to be is permanently lost, nor is she Mianaai any longer.

On Athoek Station, Breq turns to improving the living conditions in a neglected area called the Undergarden and encounters Dlique, a translator for the Presger, the aliens who made Breq's gun and who used to be "not enemies so much as predators" (*AS* 103) of humans before Anaander Mianaai made a treaty with them. The eccentrically behaving translator is accidentally killed by an ancillary of *Sword of Atagaris*, another warship present at the station. Breq and *Sword of Atagaris*'s Captain Hetnys travel down to the planet Athoek to mourn, hoping that due attention to ritual will placate the Presger. They stay on the estate of a wealthy tea grower, whose workers, as Breq is forced to notice, are hardly better off than slaves. In addition, it seems that a number of suspended transportees assigned to the tea fields have gone missing over the years. At the end of *Ancillary Sword*, Captain Hetnys, apparently in the service of the hostile Mianaai, tries to attack Breq by threatening Basnaaid Elming, Awn's sister, and in the aftermath Breq reveals her true identity to her crew and Basnaaid.

In *Ancillary Mercy*, the situation on Athoek Station keeps on getting more tense, as an ancillary of an ancient ship called *Sphene* is found in the Undergarden. The ship itself has been hiding behind a gate that leads into an abandoned system and buying the missing transportees to replenish its store of ancillaries. Before long, *Sphene* and Breq find a common cause in opposing Anaander Mianaai. In addition, a second Presger translator, who is just as eccentric as her late colleague, arrives but seems to be surprisingly unconcerned by Dlique's death. Meanwhile, the hostile faction of Anaander Mianaai is approaching the system with warlike intentions.

Breq decides to free the artificial intelligences of Athoek Station, *Sword of Atagaris*, and *Mercy of Kalr* from Anaander Mianaai's rule with the help of Tisarwat, who knows the necessary codes because of her brief past as Mianaai. Instead of fleeing, Breq and the others on *Mercy of Kalr* decide to stay and protect Station and its inhabitants from Mianaai's attack, even if the odds seem hopeless. In a surprise attack against Mianaai's ships, Breq has a close call with death but manages to destroy the majority of Mianaai's fleet almost single-handedly with the Presger gun, which, it turns out afterward, was designed for exactly that purpose. Seivarden's mission to kill Mianaai, or the bodies of her now holding Athoek Station, fails, however, and Breq agrees to surrender herself to Mianaai in exchange for the freedom of *Mercy of Kalr*, its crew, and the AI of Athoek Station. Instead of doing so, however, with the support of the Presger translator Zeiat, she declares on the spur of the moment Athoek System a republic and insists that AIs are an independent intelligent species

different from humans. The treaty made with the Presger prohibits hostilities between all "Significant" species, meaning that attacking the AIs could potentially be interpreted as an act against the Presger, and so Mianaai is forced to retreat, at least for the time being.

As can be seen from the synopsis, the *Imperial Radch* can be classified as science fiction, or more specifically speaking space opera, a subgenre defined by Brian M. Stableford and David Langford as "colourful action-adventure stories of interplanetary or interstellar conflict." The *Imperial Radch* adheres to many of the conventions of the genre: there is action, adventure, and interstellar conflict, but at the same time Breq's story is deeply personal, and the personal, interpersonal, and local dimension of the events is at least as important as the politics of an interstellar empire. While *Ancillary Justice* focuses mainly on Breq's personal revenge, the two subsequent novels *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy* concentrate mostly on Breq's relationships with the people around her and the local injustices she discovers. Furthermore, even when galactic politics come into play, they often take the form of diplomacy and talking, rather than spectacular space battles. As pointed out in *Ancillary Sword*, the life of a soldier is "[f]rantic action, then months or even years waiting for something to happen" (311).

### 1.2 Theoretical Background: Literal Metaphors, Focalization, Narration, and Experientiality

My theoretical starting point that conveniently brings together genre and methodology is Brian McHale's article "Speculative Fiction, or, Literal Narratology." McHale starts by defining speculative fiction as a genre that "typically proceeds by taking expressions that in most other contexts would be treated as figurative, and constructing and implying worlds in which those expressions make literal sense" (317). In other words, speculative fiction, and science fiction as its subgenre, make metaphors literal. McHale proceeds by stating that many narratological concepts and tools, such as temporal disorder, focalization, omniscience, and worldbuilding, are "essentially figural," and therefore they can be literalized in speculative fiction, which enables us to reflect on them critically (319). McHale's focus is thus on looking at narratology through fiction, whereas I take his ideas back to the more traditional ground of analyzing a work of fiction through narratology. Of most relevance for my present topic and for the primary material are two of McHale's examples: omniscience and focalization.

In my use of terms, I mostly draw on Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's take on narration and focalization, presented in her book *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. Rimmon-Kenan on her part mostly follows Gérard Genette's footsteps, laid down in his

seminal treatise *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, even if she also disagrees with Genette on some points. Like Genette, Rimmon-Kenan emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between narration and focalization (73–75), a point summarized by Genette in the distinction between "who speaks" and "who sees" (*Narrative* 186). Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes between two types of focalization in relation to its position relative to the story: *internal* and *external*. These typically take the form of a character-focalizer and a narrator-focalizer, respectively (76). For Rimmon-Kenan, focalization is not only about perception, and thus, in addition to a *perceptual* facet, she includes two further aspects in her discussion: the *psychological* and the *ideological*. The perceptual facet encompasses the focalizer's "sensory range" and is "determined by two main coordinates: space and time" (79–81). The psychological facet is about "mind and emotion," and the ideological one concerns the norms the text seems to project (81–84). According to Rimmon-Kenan, the facets "may concur but they may also belong to different, even clashing focalizers" (84).

In terms of narration, Rimmon-Kenan compiles a useful typology of narrators. In relation to narrative level, a narrator can be either *extradiegetic* or *intradiegetic*: above the story they narrate or on the same level with it, so that a "first-degree" narrator is extradiegetic, while the narrator of an embedded narrative is intradiegetic (97). In relation to participation in the story, a narrator can be either *homodiegetic* or *heterodiegetic*, depending on whether they feature in the story as a character or not (98). Narrators can also be analyzed in relation to their degree of perceptibility, which can range from maximal overtness to maximal covertness (99). Another continuum along which narrators can be placed concerns their (un)reliability (103). In my analysis of unreliability in chapter 4, I mostly draw on James Phelan's account on the matter, which is presented in his book *Living to Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* and can be characterized as a rhetorical approach.

Central to my analysis of the novels is also the insight of Monika Fludernik and Alan Palmer who both maintain that the events of a narrative are always *experiential* in nature. Fludernik defines *experientiality* as the "quasi-mimetic evocation of 'real-life' experience" (9). Similarly, for Palmer, storyworld events are *aspectual*: each character views them under a different aspect, or from a different point of view, and therefore storyworld events are not only events but experiences (*Fictional* 194). Seeing something as an experience rather than just as an event also emphasizes embodiment, since it is primarily through their bodies that humans experience the world. In fact, for Fludernik "embodiment and experience in human terms are indeed the same thing" (22). For Fludernik, experientiality equals narrativity, while David Herman, for example, is less extreme in his approach and sees

experientiality as only one of the basic elements of narrative (144). He subsumes it to his discussion of the concept *qualia*, "the sense of what it's like for someone or something to have a particular experience" (144). Herman's scope is wider than Fludernik's in that he recognizes that a "something" can have an experience, too, while Fludernik focuses specifically on human experientiality. The potential narratives may have for reflecting nonhuman experientiality has also been discussed by Lars Bernaerts et al. in the context of nonhuman narrators. According to them, stories with nonhuman narrators involve both empathy and defamiliarization, human and nonhuman experientiality:

> Non-human narrators prompt readers to project human experience onto creatures and objects that are not conventionally expected to have that kind of mental perspective (in other words, readers 'empathize' and 'naturalize'); at the same time, readers have to acknowledge the otherness of non-human narrators, who may question (defamiliarize) some of readers' assumptions and expectations about human life and consciousness. (69)

Linking the notion of experientiality with McHale's arguments on the literalizing potential of speculative fiction, I would argue that in works like Leckie's trilogy where narratological concepts become literalized, they are also experienced and embodied by nonhuman characters.

## 2. Focalization and Narration in the *Justice of Toren* Storyline of *Ancillary Justice*

In this chapter, I analyze focalization and narration in *Ancillary Justice*, more specifically in its storyline set further in the past. I first analyze the storyline through the concept of omniscient narration and then that of variable focalization. The reason for focusing on the past storyline is that it is quite exceptional in light of these narratological phenomena, while the more recent storyline is more conventional in this respect. The more recent storyline enters the picture in the last subsection of this chapter, however, as it has the dual storyline structure itself as its topic.

### 2.1 Literal Omniscience: "The AI Sees Everything"

According to McHale, one of the narratological concepts that speculative fiction can literalize is omniscience, essentially by depicting a machine that is able to perceive and know everything (326). Rimmon-Kenan notes that the knowledge of an internal focalizer is "restricted by definition" because someone who is part of the storyworld cannot know everything about it (81). McHale's notion of literalized omniscience, on the other hand, turns omniscience exactly into what it according to Rimmon-Kenan cannot be: a story-internal phenomenon. While Rimmon-Kenan's statement holds true for realist writing, speculative fiction can challenge this division, since it is not restricted by the rules of the real world. For example, in the case of *Ancillary Justice*, it is not the extradiegetic narrator that is omniscient, or seems to be, but a focalizing character within the story: *Justice of Toren* may not know everything about the storyworld but enough to appear omniscient. The rest of this subsection is devoted to examining the consequences of this character-bound omniscience in *Ancillary Justice*.

Rimmon-Kenan lists characteristics traditionally associated with an omniscient narrator: "familiarity, in principle, with the characters' innermost thoughts and feelings; knowledge of past, present and future; presence in locations where characters are supposed to be unaccompanied […] and knowledge of what happens in several places at the same time" (98). As the analysis that follows shows, all of these characteristics, except for knowledge of the future, apply at least to some extent to *Justice of Toren*. Moreover, even knowledge of the future is enabled, to a degree, by the story being narrated by Breq, a homo- and extradiegetic narrator. For her, the events are in the past, and she is therefore able to take a retrospective stance on them, even if the experiencing self has no privileged knowledge of the future. For

example, Breq's comment on a prayer recited by Awn and the other lieutenants lends the narration a note of nostalgia and longing: "I can sometimes hear it still when I wake, like a distant voice somewhere behind me" (*AJ* 43).

Accordingly, the impression of omniscience is partly the result of the temporal distance between the experiencing I and the narrating I, which in itself of course is nothing extraordinary but a staple of first person narration (see e.g. Edmiston). More importantly, however, it is created by the kind of being the experiencing I *Justice of Toren*/One Esk is as a character. Therefore, it can be said that *Justice of Toren* as a character literalizes omniscience, or, as Roine puts it in her analysis of the novel, "omniscient narration is concretised in a naturalised character" (179). Because the omniscience is character-bound in the novel, there is an interesting tension between what appears to be omniscience but, in some ways, falls short of it. Furthermore, as omniscience becomes a potential attribute of a character, we are not only dealing with the literary effect of omniscience but also the experience of being at least close to omniscient.

*Justice of Toren* is a troop carrier, a massive spaceship orbiting a planet called Shis'urna, which has been "annexed," or colonized, by the Radch quite recently. In addition to being a ship, *Justice of Toren* is also embodied in all the ancillary soldiers serving on that ship, some of whom, forming collectively the decade of One Esk, are on duty on the surface of the planet. The officers who serve on the ship are humans, but *Justice of Toren* constantly receives "internal data" on them, the result of which is illustrated as follows: "Lieutenant Awn's face heated, her distress and anger plain to me. I couldn't read her mind, but I could read every twitch of her every muscle, so her emotions were as transparent to me as glass" (*AJ* 17). So *Justice of Toren* may fall short of being familiar with other characters' thoughts, but it certainly knows their feelings and is therefore quite often able to deduce what they are thinking. In the example above, the first person pronoun is prominent, but in other places where it is not, the impression comes close to a heterodiegetic narrator using what Dorrit Cohn calls *psycho-narration*, a narratorial description of a character's inner state (11–12, 21–57). For example, when One Esk and Lieutenant Awn are returning to *Justice of Toren*, there is a description of both her present and earlier feelings: "But the tiny spaces—which when she had first come to *Justice of Toren* had excited pride in her assignment and anticipation of what the future might hold—now seemed to trap and confine her. She was tense and unhappy" (*AJ* 168). Taken out of context, the sentences could pass for a heterodiegetic (omniscient) narrator depicting a character's inner world. The only textual indicator that the focalizer is still One Esk and not Awn herself is the word "seemed."

It needs to be remembered, however, that it is only a restricted set of characters that *Justice of Toren* knows so intimately: One Esk on Shis'urna is mostly surrounded by people whose feelings it cannot perceive directly, Awn alone is transparent to it. *Justice of Toren*, on the other hand, is so used to monitoring the people aboard it that the presence of Anaander Mianaai, whom it cannot read, feels odd to it: she is "unreal, in a sense, since I could only see her exteriors" (*AJ* 202). Similarly, One Esk is accustomed to having access to the inner world of its lieutenant, and it is emotionally very attached to her. That is why when the connection suddenly goes down, losing sense of Awn is "worst of all," even if One Esk also loses all connections between the parts of itself and is left feeling "blind, deaf, immobile" (*AJ* 112). Having access to the feelings of others is the normal state of events for it and a natural part of its consciousness. All in all, even if *Justice of Toren*/One Esk is not able to read minds, it is still able to do something that character-focalizers usually cannot do: to perceive other characters as the object of focalization from within (see Rimmon-Kenan 78). Moreover, just as more traditional omniscient narrators may restrict their inside view to only one or a few central characters, Breq mainly recounts the emotions of Lieutenant Awn. This is understandable, as she is the most important character in the story besides *Justice of Toren*/One Esk itself and especially dear to One Esk.

When it comes to knowledge of the past, it is significant that *Justice of Toren*, and thus Breq's consciousness, is over two thousand years old. Of course, *Justice of Toren* does not know everything that has ever happened in the universe, but its knowledge still exceeds any human capability, which may give the impression of omniscience. However, in contrast to a traditional, impersonal omniscient narrator, *Justice of Toren*'s knowledge of the past is mostly tied to personal experience. Breq can, for example, recount the history of a colored temple window hanging in one of the ship's rooms because she remembers "taking it out of the wall myself and carrying it back here" (*AJ* 175). In a similar vein, she can remark that Lieutenant Awn occupies the same quarters on the ship as Seivarden before her, even if over a thousand years have passed in between (*AJ* 169).

Because *Justice of Toren* is an AI, its memory is in some ways different from that of human beings. One Esk is, for example, able to "consult" its own memory, the memory of *Justice of Toren*, to find out if a cache of hidden guns includes ones that have been confiscated earlier (*AJ* 90). Not only is *Justice of Toren*'s memory much more detailed than that of a human being, but it is also able to let others see and hear the memories, just as if they were camera footage. Hence, it is all the more distressing for it to find out that the "recorded" version of its memories does not correspond to what it feels like being able to remember. This

duality of memory is also what first suggests to it that One Esk might actually be something more than just a part of *Justice of Toren*: "The first I noticed even the bare possibility that I–*Justice of Toren* might not also be I–One Esk, was that moment that *Justice of Toren* edited One Esk's memory of the slaughter in the temple of Ikkt. The moment I—'I'—was *surprised* by it" (*AJ* 207, emphasis original). On the other hand, the idea of the memory of an AI being like a recording makes it easier to understand how someone's memory could be edited. Even so, the editing does not seem to alter what *Justice of Toren*/One Esk knows or remembers deep down: there would be no surprise, if that particular memory had been completely wiped away.

*Justice of Toren* is also present in places where characters are supposed to be unaccompanied, or to be more precise, characters are not unaccompanied in situations where readers might expect them to be. This is because the Radch is a society that keeps a keen eye on its citizens and soldiers and uses the AIs for surveillance: "'On a station,' Lieutenant Awn said, 'the AI sees everything,'" and One Esk goes on to reflect: "Military ships possessed AIs just as stations did, and Radchaai soldiers lived utterly without privacy" (*AJ* 56–57). *Justice of Toren* knows everything that happens aboard it, and therefore Breq is, for example, able to comment on even the most private relations of its officers. Recounting a memory that takes her back to her shared history with Seivarden, rather than the more recent past with Awn, Breq narrates: "'Ah!' said Seivarden, sharp and peremptory. 'You think it's harmless fun. Well, it would probably be fun.' Seivarden had slept with the lieutenant in question herself at one point and knew whereof she spoke" (*AJ* 69). Just like the access to its crew's feelings, the knowledge of all their deeds, even intimate ones, is simply another part of *Justice of Toren*'s consciousness.

*Justice of Toren*'s ability to know what happens in multiple places at the same time is simply a result of its being in multiple places simultaneously: it is the ship perceiving Shis'urna from orbit, the soldiers aboard the ship, and One Esk on the planet. What is more, One Esk can be in multiple places simultaneously itself, since it has more than one body. Still, neither *Justice of Toren* nor One Esk can be anywhere they want, so its ability to know what happens in several places simultaneously is mostly tied to its being in those places in person. Therefore, this is another manifestation of how omniscience is embodied in the novel: knowledge and perception are tied to a body, even if they appear quite unlimited. In contrast to the notion of an omniscient narrator being in multiple places simultaneously, Robert Scholes et al. write that "a narrator in fiction is imbedded in a time-bound artifact. He does not 'know' simultaneously but consecutively. He is not everywhere at once but now here,

now there, now looking into this mind or that, now moving on to other vantage points" (272–73). This observation is also quoted by McHale in his argument on how speculative fiction can literalize omniscience. Thus, the linear nature of narrative, a "time-bound artifact," makes the presentation of *Justice of Toren*'s being simultaneously in various places consecutive. Breq, for example, recounts two concurrent discussions, one between *Justice of Toren* and Anaander Mianaai, another between the Lieutenants Awn and Dariet, by switching back and forth between them (*AJ* 208–11).

All in all, it seems that the narration in the earlier storyline of *Ancillary Justice* is omniscient in effect if not always in principle. In an interview, Leckie calls this "a nifty short-circuit around one of the more obvious limitations of a first-person narrator" (*AJ extras*). Still, as my analysis shows, by combining first person and omniscient narration, it is more than just a way of having your cake and eating it. It is part of *Justice of Toren*'s experience, the "what it's like" to have a consciousness spread over a spaceship and dozens of human bodies, to use Herman's phrase (144). For *Justice of Toren*, it is quite normal to keep track of things happening in multiple places simultaneously or to know what the people around it are feeling. In contrast, having, and being, just one body, which is the normal state of affairs for most people, is for Breq a very strange experience. Before delving more deeply into Breq's experiences, however, the next subchapter looks more closely at another central part of *Justice of Toren*'s consciousness, namely its being both *Justice of Toren* and One Esk, and how this distinction is related to focalization.

## 2.2 Variable Focalization: Breq, *Justice of Toren*, and One Esk

According to Rimmon-Kenan, focalization in a homodiegetic narrative is external when the focalizer is the narrating self, and internal when the focalizer is the experiencing self (76). For Mieke Bal, the shift from such an external focalizer to an internal one means that the focalization through the character is embedded in the external focalization: the external focalizer always keeps the focalization, and the internal focalizer, or what she calls a *character-bound focalizer*, focalizes "on the second level" (142–43). James Phelan, on the other hand, sees this kind of change in focalization as a veritable shift from one focalizer to another: "the audience doffs the narrator's lenses and dons the character's" ("Narrators" 58). In this subsection, I examine this alternation between external and internal focalization in *Ancillary Justice*, but also the shifts in focalization that take place between the different experiencing selves. The shifts in internal focalization concern *Justice of Toren*, One Esk, and

occasionally segments belonging to other decades, even though only One Esk is depicted as having a personality different from the rest of the ship.

The most tangible characteristic of One Esk that makes it stand out of the rest is its penchant for singing:

> I—that is, I–One Esk—first sang to amuse one of my lieutenants, when *Justice of Toren* had hardly been commissioned a hundred years. […] it was a matter of rumor and some indulgent smiles that *Justice of Toren* had an interest in singing. Which it didn't—I—I–*Justice of Toren*—tolerated the habit because it was harmless, and because it was quite possible that one of my captains would appreciate it. (*AJ* 23)

The above passage also shows the ambiguity of the first person pronoun which has to be narrowed down to mean either One Esk or *Justice of Toren* for the combination of an "I" who likes to sing and an "I" who only tolerates it to make sense. Since the referent of the pronoun is not always mentioned so explicitly, it is sometimes nearly impossible to deduce from the text which "I" is in question, especially when One Esk is back on the ship. This is, however, only fitting, as it is difficult for even Breq herself to tell the two parts of her former self apart, or as she puts it: "It's hard for me to know how much of myself I remember" (*AJ* 267). For *Justice of Toren*/One Esk, making the distinction is arguably even harder, as it does not have the advantage of a retrospective perspective. Focalization through the narrating self, on the other hand, allows such a retrospective view of the events and makes it possible for Breq to contemplate the problematic constitution of her identity, being one but being also many:

> Nearly twenty years later "I" would be a single body, a single brain. That division, I–*Justice of Toren* and I–One Esk, was not, I have come to think, a sudden split, not an instant before which "I" was one and after which "I" was "we." […]
>
> Or is *anyone's* identity a matter of fragments held together by convenient or useful narrative, that in ordinary circumstances never reveals itself as a fiction? Or is it really a fiction?
>
> I don't know the answer. But I do know that, though I can see hints of the potential split going back a thousand years or more, that's only hindsight. […]
>
> It makes the history hard to convey. Because still, "I" was me, unitary, one thing, and yet I acted against myself, contrary to my interests and desires, sometimes secretly, deceiving myself as to what I knew and did. And it's difficult for me even now to know who performed what actions, or knew which information. Because *I* was *Justice of Toren*. Even when I wasn't. Even if I'm not anymore. (*AJ* 207–8, emphases original)

Here Breq speculates explicitly on the importance of narrative for identity building. Her speculation draws a parallel between her identity, which is literally divided into two fragments, and the more conventional idea of human identity as a construct held together by the stories people tell themselves about themselves. Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning, for example, write about narratives being understood in narrative psychology as sustaining the human "(illusionary and always fluctuating) sense of sameness" upon which identity is based (6). At the same time, Breq's explicit speculation may also be seen as alluding to the fictionality of the text itself, since in the final analysis, Breq's identity as a fictional character is of course nothing more than a narrative construct. Therefore, the passage, and the novel more generally, exemplify how, as Bernaerts et al. write, "non-human narration can challenge readers to reconsider familiar ideas on reality, identity, [and] existence" (75).

Because of its multi-bodied existence, the shifts from one segment of One Esk to another can also be interpreted as shifts in focalization, but they are limited to the spatial axis of the perceptional facet:

> I stood at the entrance, silent and straight, as a junior priest laid cups and bowls in between Lieutenant Awn and the Divine.
>
> I also stood some forty meters away, in the temple itself […]
>
> Outside the doors of the temple I also stood in the cyanophyte-stained plaza, watching people as they passed. (*AJ* 12–13)

In instances such as the one above, focalization shifts "from the view of one limited observer to another" (Rimmon-Kenan 80), to the extent that a different body can constitute a different observer. In other words, the eyes, ears, and other sensory organs change, but the mind of the focalizer stays the same.

A shift from One Esk to *Justice of Toren*, on the other hand, is not merely spatial, but at least psychological, perhaps even ideological. The following passage, for example, shows the detached view that *Justice of Toren* has of the events that took place on Shis'urna, which is in contrast to One Esk's more subjective perspective that has previously been prevalent in the text:

> Except for those hours when communications had been cut off, I had never really lost the sense of being part of *Justice of Toren*. My kilometers of white-walled corridors, my captain, the decade commanders, each decade's lieutenants, each one's smallest gesture, each breath was visible to me. I had never lost the knowledge of my ancillaries, […]. Never lost the view of Shis'urna itself, all blue and white, old

> boundaries and divisions erased by distance. From that perspective events in Ors were nothing, invisible, completely insignificant.
>
> In the approaching shuttle I felt the distance decrease, felt more forcefully the sensation of *being* the ship. One Esk became even more what it had always been—one small part of myself. My attention was no longer commanded by things apart from the rest of the ship. (*AJ* 167, emphasis original)

In the first sentence, "I" is One Esk, but in the second one, focalization shifts and so does the referent of the pronoun: "my" can only refer to *Justice of Toren*, because One Esk, who consists of twenty human bodies, does not have any "white-walled corridors." Interestingly, the sentence beginning with "From that perspective" suggests that it is also possible to have some other perspective on the events, even as the broad and dispassionate outlook of the ship is presented. The passage also implies that the two perspectives, that of One Esk and that of *Justice of Toren*, are actually both constantly present for the experiencing self, but as already noted in relation to the notion of an omniscient narrator being in multiple places at the same time, they cannot be represented simultaneously in the text. This in turn makes it seem like focalization would shift back and forth. So, in a way, it would make sense to follow Bal's view of embedding and claim that One Esk's focalization is embedded in the focalization of *Justice of Toren*, even if *Justice of Toren* is not the narrator but a focalizing character.

Maintaining that the two perspectives are both constantly present for *Justice of Toren*/One Esk does not mean that the perspectives are harmonious or that one of the outlooks could not be more prominent at times. Therefore, the shifts in focalization emphasize the dual nature of *Justice of Toren*/One Esk. This is most clearly seen when a shift in focalization also means a literal change of perspective for the experiencing self. Because such shifts are not only a matter of form, they can also have tangible consequences for the story. The following passage shows such a shift which directly results in action:

> Lieutenant Awn lay on the floor of the Var decade room, facedown again, dead. The floor under her would need repair, and cleaning. The urgent issue, the important thing, at that moment, was to get One Esk moving because in approximately half a second no amount of filtering I could do would hide the strength of its reaction and I really needed to tell the captain what had happened and I couldn't remember Mianaai's enemy—Mianaai herself—laying down the orders I knew she had laid on me and why couldn't One Esk see how important it was, we weren't ready to move openly yet and I'd lost officers before and who was One Esk anyway except me, myself, and Lieutenant Awn was dead and she had said, *I should have died rather than obey you.*
>
> And then One Var swung the gun up and shot Anaander Mianaai point-blank in the face. (*AJ* 247–48)

*Justice of Toren*, in the form of a segment of One Var, has shot Lieutenant Awn on Anaander Mianaai's orders and now tries to stay in control of the situation. Breq recounts the thoughts of her former self in the situation in *self-narrated monologue*, which is Cohn's term for *free indirect discourse* in the first person (14, 166–72). At first, *Justice of Toren* focuses on practical matters which may seem inconsequential in the situation: repairing and cleaning the floor. But as it starts to think about what really needs to be done, its growing panic and slipping control start to show in the form of a long, rambling sentence. It tries to focus on the orders set by the other Mianaai, the orders which dictate that "we" are not ready for open warfare, but the more personal perspective of One Esk and its shock caused by Awn's death prevail. One Esk may only be a part of *Justice of Toren*, but in this instant its feelings are so strong that the rest of the ship is unable to control them, and they take over the segment of One Var, so that it shoots Mianaai. The passage fits remarkably well one of the uses for self-narrated monologue mentioned by Cohn: "a highly self-centered narrator relates an existential crisis that has remained unresolved" (168).

Since Breq used to be a segment of One Esk, it is natural that One Esk features more prominently as a focalizer than the segments from other decades. There is, however, at least one exception to this where the events are portrayed variably through a segment of One Bo and *Justice of Toren*: "but then I looked (One Bo looked) toward the stern and saw three Anaander Mianaais sitting silent and impassive in the rear seats. Not *there*, to me" (*AJ* 182, emphasis original). Anaander Mianaai is "not *there*" for the ship because the Lord of the Radch does not have the tracker implants that the officers of the ship and regular citizens have. *Justice of Toren* needs the human eyes of One Bo to be able to perceive her, which is why focalization momentarily shifts to the segment. This shows how most of the segments are just parts of and tools for the ship, whereas One Esk has clearly become something more: an entity with a separate identity and motives that clash with those of the ship.

As Rimmon-Kenan points out, variable focalization applies not only to the focalizer but also the focalized (79). An evocative example of this kind of variation can be found in Breq's description of receiving a new ancillary segment to replace a dead one:

> The tech medic went swiftly to work, and suddenly I was on the table […] and I could see and hear but I had no control of the new body and its terror raised the heart rates of all One Esk's segments. The new segment's mouth opened and it screamed and in the background it heard laughter. I flailed, the binding came loose and I rolled off the table, fell a meter and a half to the floor with a painful *thud*.

> *Don't don't don't*, I thought at the body, but it wasn't listening. It was sick, it was terrified, it was dying. It pushed itself up and crawled, dizzy, where it didn't care so long as it got away.
>
> Then hands under my arms (elsewhere One Esk was motionless) urging me up, and Lieutenant Awn. "Help," I croaked, not in Radchaai. Damn medic pulled out a body without a decent voice. "Help me." (*AJ* 170–71)

The passage shows how the new body is separate from One Esk but, on the other hand, also how One Esk's experiences being the body. The pronouns shift between "I" and "it" to show how the body is at times focalized from within, sometimes from without. The body is in terror, but it is never said that One Esk, let alone *Justice of Toren*, is: what the body feels is just a part of what One Esk feels as a whole. Still, the new segment in some sense takes over the rest of One Esk, raising the heart rate of the whole and making it unable to continue what it was doing. Yet, even as the body feels like dying, One Esk is able to distance itself from it and lament the lack of "a decent voice," which for One Esk has more weight than the acute but transient panic of the body. The passage shows how different the experience of one's bodily sensations can become if one is not limited to one body and could therefore, to use Bernaert et al.'s phrase, be seen as "evok[ing] non-human experientiality" (75).

As my analysis shows, the focalization in *Ancillary Justice* is variable on many levels: it not only varies between the external viewpoint of the narrating self and the internal view of the experiencing self, but the internal focalization is also variable in itself, by shifting between different experiencing selves and also between focalization from within and without as regards the focalized object. The variable focalization in the novel underlines the fragmentary nature of *Justice of Toren*'s identity, ranging from the exploration of what it is to have multiple identities within one being to showing what can happen when identity finally cracks into two parts. All of this is juxtaposed with another split identity, that of Anaander Mianaai, whose being of two minds, quite literally, is what ultimately causes all that happens to *Justice of Toren*. It may well be that both splits are inevitable, that when one lives long enough with multiple bodies, it becomes impossible to sustain a unitary view of oneself. Breq thinks that her own division "had always been possible, always potential" (*AJ* 207), and in *Ancillary Sword*, she observes that Anaander Mianaai's schism has similarly been "a crisis waiting to happen" (107). This would go to show that one's identity cannot really be separated from the body one occupies.

## 2.3 The Dual Storyline Structure: Analepses or an Embedded Story?

*Ancillary Justice* consists of what could be called two storylines: one concerned with Breq and the other with *Justice of Toren*/One Esk. The backstory and the more recent experience alternate, so that every other chapter is set in the past until the destruction of *Justice of Toren*. Following this, the nineteen years between the two storylines are briefly summarized, and subsequently the narrative stays with the more recent experience. John Clute and David Langford call this structure a "double storyline – one in the present tense, one dovetailing into present events from the past," even if in fact both storylines are narrated in the past tense. The events of one storyline are just more recent than those of the other one. The storyline that focuses on *Justice of Toren*/One Esk has more narratorial commentary, which clearly signals that the events are in the past, even though the more recent one is not devoid of such markers either. Breq as narrator can, for example, foreshadow the future by saying: "What happened next was largely my own fault" (*AJ* 195). Such occasions are, however, quite rare, and it is never indicated what the time or place of telling would be for the later events. Therefore, they seem to come across as less mediated in comparison to the more distant past, and it is understandable why the more recent strand of the story may appear to be "the present." Roine, too, discusses "two timelines: one in the present of the first-person narrator Breq and the other nineteen years in the past" (170–71), but the use of past tense shows that both parts of the story are in the past.

In my view, there are two ways of interpreting the structure of the novel: either the chapters that take place further in the past are *analepses*, or flashbacks, or they are an embedded story that Breq tells Arilesperas Strigan in order to convince Strigan to give her the Presger gun. This would make Strigan the *narratee* of the story. If the story of *Justice of Toren* is interpreted as consisting of analepses, it comes across as Breq exploring her past identity and its effects on her later self. In other words, it would fit the following characterization by Neumann and Nünning: "Characteristically, texts that deal with narrative construction of identity are presented by a reminiscing narrator or figure who looks back on his or her past, trying to impose narrative structure on the surfacing memories from a present point of view" (13). If, however, they are interpreted as an embedded story, or as a *hypodiegetic* narrative, to use the term preferred by Rimmon-Kenan, they obtain a more instrumental nature as something that Breq narrates in order to be able to continue her quest of revenge. In addition, they also serve readers in recounting Breq's backstory and in explaining what kind of being she actually is, and how she has ended up where she is.

It is unambiguously stated in the novel that Breq tells Strigan a story, and it is at least implied that the story is indeed the same as the one forming the second storyline:

> The explanation, why I needed the gun, why I wanted to kill Anaander Mianaai, took a long time. The answer was not a simple one—or, more accurately, the simple answer would only raise further questions for Strigan, so I did not attempt to use it but instead began the whole story at the beginning (*AJ* 154)

Still, this does not mean that the discourse that forms the second storyline would have to be the same as that of the story Breq recounts to Strigan. Indeed, textually it seems more likely that the chapters with *Justice of Toren*/One Esk are analepses, since there are no implications in the second storyline itself of Strigan being the narratee. For one thing, Breq uses the pronoun *she* for all characters, which implies that she is speaking Radchaai, whereas in her discussions with Strigan she uses mainly other languages. The chapters also contain information that serves rather the readers, to whom the storyworld is completely new, than a story-internal narratee. Breq uses, for example, an entire paragraph to describe what kind of being Anaander Mianaai is and what authority she has in the Radch space (*AJ* 95), which Strigan certainly knows already. This does not make it impossible to interpret the sequences as forming an embedded narrative: James Phelan calls the phenomenon where the narrator gives the narratee information they already have *redundant telling*, and he sees the author's need to communicate something to the readers as its motivation (*Living* 11–12). Nevertheless, the prevalence of such information makes it harder to view Strigan as the narratee. Furthermore, the way the two storylines alternate in the novel also points toward one of them consisting of analepses: an embedded story would more typically begin at the moment of storytelling and end when the hypodiegetic narrator is finished with the story (see Rimmon-Kenan 96). The chapters set further in the past, however, continue even after Breq finishes her story to Strigan. This means that when Strigan already knows the whole story and is convinced to part with the gun, readers still have to wonder about the exact nature of Breq's motives for quite some time, which suggests that the structure is also a device for creating suspense.

Regardless of whether Breq's history is actually categorized as an embedded story or as analepses, it is fruitful to examine it through the functions of embedded narratives described by Rimmon-Kenan. According to her, hypodiegetic narratives can be *actional* in that they advance the action of the first story merely by being told, *explicative* in explaining

some aspects of the higher-order story, or *thematic* which means that there exists some kind of analogy between the two stories (95). Breq's backstory may be seen as having an actional function in the sense that her story convinces Strigan to give the Presger gun to her and thus enables Breq to continue her revenge mission. Therefore, it is not exactly the telling of the story that advances the action but the consequences of telling the story. The explicative function is even more clearly present: the second storyline explains Breq's motivation for revenge and, for example, why she talks about her "segments" or states: "I wasn't a person, I was a piece of equipment" (*AJ* 2). It is also possible to see an analogy between the past and the more recent happenings, not plot-wise but in the representation of Breq and how her past and present self differ from each other. As Roine puts it, "Breq's status as a single, lone entity is juxtaposed with the multifaceted totality of the *Justice of Toren*" (170).

This juxtaposition is further emphasized by the fact that Breq often filters her more recent experience through her past existence: she explains her inability to give a reason for some of the things she does, such as rescuing Seivarden, by not being used to having no "orders to follow from one moment to the next" (*AJ* 1), and she feels "the disorientation of not being able to see through other eyes that I knew I had once had" when she closes her eyes (*AJ* 139). Having just one body changes how she experiences the world and herself. In her most pessimistic view, she is "a *myself* that was only a fragment of what I had been, with no conceivable future beyond eternally wishing for what was gone" (*AJ* 256, emphasis original). Being reduced in this way necessarily affects who she is and how she views herself.

Two of the functions of hypodiegetic narratives, the explicative and the thematic, apply to the second storyline regardless of whether it is interpreted as an embedded story or as a series of analepses, as only the actional function actually requires that there is a story narrated within the story. Therefore, while there are two conceivable interpretations for the structure, the textual elements seem to point toward reading the second storyline as analepses, that is, as expositional background to the main plot. This interpretation also correlates more clearly with the identity related themes of the novel: Breq is not returning to her past only to get what she wants, but in fact she is actively trying to make sense of what has happened to her and who, or what, she used to be. Through its structure, the novel juxtaposes the singular, and seemingly human, existence of Breq with her plural, nonhuman past.

## 2.4 Concluding Remarks

My analysis has shown how narrative form and content become entangled in *Ancillary Justice*, and how its focalization and narration work to support its identity related themes. In the novel, omniscience is not related to an impersonal narrator. Rather, it becomes embodied in the character *Justice of Toren*, thus turning omniscience into a literal phenomenon and a natural part of *Justice of Toren*'s experience and existence. Focalization in the novel shifts between One Esk, *Justice of Toren*, and Breq. The shifts between the different parts of the experiencing self reflect the fragmented nature of the character and contribute to the narrative content in that a change in focalization can signal a literal change of mind for *Justice of Toren*/One Esk. Focalization through the narrating self, on the other hand, allows for a retrospective view and for Breq's explicit contemplation on her past identity and its consequences for the later self. The overall structure of the novel can be interpreted in two ways, but the textual elements seem to point toward the second storyline consisting of expositional analepses. The structure emphasizes the differences between Breq's past and present self by juxtaposing the two. Thus, it can be said that the formal features pertain strongly to the representation of Breq's multiple identities, just as her identity is bound to the physical form she has: once a massive starship conjoined with numerous human bodies, now only a lone soldier.

## 3. Focalization (and Narration) in *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy*

In this chapter, I discuss focalization in the two latter novels of the *Imperial Radch* trilogy, *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy*, and touch occasionally on their narration. The first subchapter focuses on the formal features of focalization in the novels, while in the second subchapter, I approach the novels through the notion of experientiality and discuss how focalization connects with the plot of the novels and with Breq's identity. As the novels do not significantly differ from each other formally, there is no need to analyze them separately, but the textual evidence in the former subchapter comes mostly from *Ancillary Sword*, while the latter one focuses more on *Ancillary Mercy*.

### 3.1 Breq and Variable Internal Focalization

According to Brian McHale, focalization, like omniscience, can be literalized in speculative fiction (321). Or to put it more accurately, speculative fiction can literalize other modes of focalization as well as omniscience, which Gérard Genette calls *zero focalization*: narrative with no point of view restricting the information presented to readers (*Narrative* 185–86, 189). While the narration in the analepses of *Ancillary Justice* is close to omniscient, what comes across in *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy* is a literalization of another form of focalization, namely variable internal focalization, or, in other words, focalization that shifts between multiple character-focalizers. This focalization arises from intradiegetic developments: when Breq is assigned as the captain of *Mercy of Kalr*, she gets access to the data the ship collects from its soldiers and lieutenants:

> The names brought both people [Seivarden and Lieutenant Ekalu] reflexively to mind. In approximately a tenth of a second *Mercy of Kalr*, parked some thirty-five thousand kilometers away from this station, would receive that near-instinctive check for data, and a tenth of a second after that its response would reach me. (*AS* 2)

Because Breq is not a human being but used to be a ship herself, she can make sense of what for humans would be "a stream of meaningless data" (*AS* 5), and therefore, she is able to see her crew, as well as the world through her crew, in much the same way as *Mercy of Kalr* itself.

However, because of the physical limitation of having just one human brain, her capability to handle the data is restricted:

> I only had a single human brain, now, could only handle the smallest fragment of the information I'd once been constantly, unthinkingly aware of. And even that small amount required some care—I'd run straight into a bulkhead trying to walk and receive data at the same time, when I'd first tried it. (*AS* 6)

So while *Justice of Toren* was nearly omniscient in its constant awareness of almost everything around it, Breq's abilities resemble variable internal focalization in that even though she has access to other characters' perceptions, she is only able to use one pair of eyes, so to speak, at a time.

In practice, focalization in the analepses of *Ancillary Justice* also resembles variable internal focalization, because it varies between the different parts of *Justice of Toren*, in addition to shifting to narrator Breq's external perspective. What makes the focalization in *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy* different is that Breq no longer has multiple bodies, but instead, she is capable of accessing other people's feelings and perceptions so that focalization partially shifts from Breq to other characters, not to other parts of herself. The following passage, for example, includes two such semi-shifts: first to Kalr Five, a soldier through whom Breq can see herself from afar, and then to Lieutenant Tisarwat. The latter shift enables Breq to perceive what is happening on Athoek Station while she herself is on the planet:

> I set off in the direction of the lakeside trail, not turning my head to see if she followed, but hearing her step behind me, seeing her (and myself) as Five watched us out of sight from the corner of the arbor.
>
> On Athoek Station, Lieutenant Tisarwat was in the sitting room in our Undergarden quarters, speaking to Basnaaid Elming. Who'd arrived not five minutes earlier while I'd been pulling on my boots, about to leave my room. I'd been briefly tempted to make Sirix wait, but in the end I decided that by now I could watch and walk at the same time.
>
> I could see—almost feel, myself—the thrill thrumming through Tisarwat at Basnaaid's presence. (*AS* 223)

Breq is able to access other characters' perceptions and emotions, but even if she can see and hear what the other person sees and hears, she does not feel what that person feels. Other characters' emotions are rather an object of focalization, the focalized, than part of Breq's own experience (see Rimmon-Kenan 76). In other words, Breq can perceive other characters as the object of focalization from within, just as *Justice of Toren*/One Esk could in relation to

Awn and its other Lieutenants. In the passage above, Breq sees Tisarwat's emotion and almost feels it herself, but only almost, even if the emotion in question is quite strong: Tisarwat's intense teenage crush on Basnaaid. Similarly, in the following passage, Breq is able to read Kalr Five's emotions but cannot comprehend what is causing them:

> Surprise. Sheer terror. And not the least twitch of a muscle. "Sir," she said again, and there was, finally, a faint, fleeting expression of some sort, quickly gone. She swallowed. "It's the dishes."
>
> My turn to be surprised. "The dishes?"
>
> "Sir, you sent Captain Vel's things into storage here on the station." […]
>
> Five expected me to understand her. Wanted so much for me to understand. But I didn't. "Yes?"
>
> Frustration. Anger, even. Clearly, from Five's perspective what she wanted was obvious. But the only part of it that was obvious to me was the fact that she couldn't just come out and say it, even when I'd asked her to. (*AS* 7–8)

For Kalr Five, the cause of her distress is entirely clear: a fleet captain has to have a respectable set of dishes on her ship, but Breq cannot understand Five's emotions before she explains them to her explicitly. Even if the passage describes Kalr Five's emotions, the perspective is still Breq's: Breq is the focalizer, Kalr Five's feelings are the focalized.

Even when the perceptional facet of focalization shifts to a character other than Breq, the psychological and ideological facets still belong to her: she can perceive the world via other people's senses, but she does not perceive it via their knowledge, emotions, or ideologies. Rather, the psychological and ideological facets remain with Breq. For example, she describes a situation she sees through Tisarwat as follows: "Citizen Piat sat beside Tisarwat, and half a dozen other young people sat in nearby chairs. Someone had just said something funny—everyone was laughing" (*AS* 206). Unlike Tisarwat, Breq does not know all of her newfound friends by name, so the speaker is just a "someone." Furthermore, if the situation were entirely portrayed from Tisarwat's perspective, her companions would hardly be called "young people," as Tisarwat is no older than them and probably younger than some, even if the question of Tisarwat's psychological age is complicated because of her brief experience as Anaander Mianaai. So even when other focalizers become embedded in Breq's focalization, only the perceptional facet shifts to them.

Rimmon-Kenan mentions that it is possible for the facets of focalization to belong to different focalizers (84) and shows how this can create ambiguity when it is impossible to say whether the narrating or the experiencing self is focalizing a given passage in first person narrative (86–87). The situation in *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy*,

however, is not so much about ambiguity, but rather complexity, since focalization always stays with Breq to some extent, as the narrative situation is based on the abilities given to Breq on the intradiegetic level. Nonetheless, saying that the story is focalized by Breq is not nearly enough to encompass the entire range of narrative perspective present in the text. Much like Rimmon-Kenan, James Phelan discusses what he calls *dual focalization* where "the perceptions of two agents are communicated simultaneously" (*Living* 215), and just as Rimmon-Kenan, he only analyzes examples where the two agents are the narrating and the experiencing self. Nevertheless, the focalization in the two latter parts of the trilogy could be called dual, as there often seems to be more than one focalizer at a time, but the focalizers are two different characters: Breq and another member of her crew, not two manifestations of a character-narrator.

Commenting on a similar example of focalization ambiguous between the experiencing and the narrating self as Rimmon-Kenan and Phelan, Burkhard Niederhoff proposes that "[i]t is more appropriate to analyze focalization as a more abstract and variable feature of the text" rather than ask whether the narrating or the experiencing self is the focalizer (para. 17). While I do not agree with Niederhoff in his view that the concept of focalizer itself is problematic, the *Imperial Radch* trilogy certainly makes it evident that focalization does not have to be limited to only one focalizer at a time, and that such dual focalization can apply to other situations besides the coexistence of the narrating and the experiencing self's perspective. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the literalization of focalization in the series causes it to be more abstract and variable than in much fiction.

Because of her ability to see what others are feeling, Breq is sometimes able to deduce their thoughts, just as *Justice of Toren* could infer what its officers were thinking. These inferences seem to be quite accurate, or at least Breq herself is quite confident about their accuracy. In fact, she is so sure of her interpretations that other characters' thoughts are sometimes presented in the mode of direct discourse, or Dorrit Cohn's *quoted monologue*, a word-for-word quotation of "a character's mental discourse" (14): "I could almost *see* it clicking together in Bo One's mind. *Fleet Captain's angry at the Administration, not our lieutenant*" (*AS* 59, emphasis original). Free indirect thought, or what Cohn calls *narrated monologue*, "a character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse" (14), is also used. This occurs, for example, when the crew's opinion on Breq allowing them to drink tea is presented: "It had been greeted with suspicion at first. Captain Vel had insisted they only drink water. Like ancillaries. Was I trying to soften them up for something? To show off how wealthy I was? Granting a privilege that I could then deny for some satisfaction of my

own?" (*AS* 60). The latter example differs from the former not only in form but also in that it is not exactly a presentation of what is going on in the mind of a given character. Rather, it describes the general lines of thinking among the crew. Such "joint, group, shared, or collective" thinking is termed *intermental thought* by Alan Palmer (*Social* 41). However, the passage is not just a representation of the crew's intermental thinking, but Breq's interpretation of their thought processes, which means that there is another thinking entity involved in the presentation: it is Breq's private reflection of the other characters' presumed shared thinking.

In *Ancillary Mercy*, there is a section about fifty pages long where Breq is not taking part in the action. Rather, she recounts what Seivarden and Tisarwat have experienced on their respective missions: Seivarden and two Amaat soldiers seek to assassinate Mianaai while Tisarwat and a Bo soldier try to disable Mianaai's accesses to *Sword of Gurat*, the ship she arrived on at Athoek Station. During these missions, *Mercy of Kalr* and Breq aboard it are in so called gate space: "out of the universe" (*AM* 230) and unable to know what is happening anywhere outside the ship. The data from the missions is stored on external archives, and Breq's account is based on the data retrieved from those archives once *Mercy of Kalr* has returned to normal space. Interestingly, the focalization in this section seems to shift more noticeably away from Breq than in other parts of the novels, or at least Breq's role as the narrator becomes less noticeable when she is not participating in the action herself. The following passage, for example, presents Seivarden and her Amaats' thoughts in narrated monologue:

> "Right," Seivarden said. There was no time to worry about the AI cores. No time to be afraid of three humans facing four ancillaries in five minutes' time. Seivarden had the Presger gun and there was, in the end, only one condition that needed to be met, only one truly necessary thing. And they had planned for this, Seivarden and her Amaats, had hoped Anaander would have taken the governor's office, hoped they would have just such an opportunity. "Time to move." (*AM* 234–35)

If we presume that Breq has not gained any additional access to the minds of other characters, the passage has to be interpreted as Breq's assumptions about what Seivarden and the Amaats must be thinking and feeling. It lacks the reference to an "I" that is present in the earlier examples of thought presentation, and so it looks just like thought presentation by a heterodiegetic narrator. It seems that being outside the action, and so in a way heterodiegetic at the moment, allows Breq to immerse herself more fully in what the others are experiencing. Even if the presence of free indirect thought does not automatically mean that a passage is

internally focalized through the character whose thoughts are portrayed, there is a connection between the two. Cohn, for example, calls narrated monologue "the quintessence of figural narration" (111), *figural narration* being Franz K. Stanzel's term for a narrative situation that corresponds to Genette's internal focalization. Thus, the section shows how closely Breq's narration resembles heterodiegetic narration with variable internal focalization when the references to what she herself is doing and experiencing are removed. Even though there are more than two characters involved in the focalization, it is similar to the earlier examples of what I call dual focalization, and therefore it could be called *complex focalization*. However, Seivarden and the Amaats do not actually have separate perspectives. Rather, they are portrayed as sharing the same, or at least similar, thoughts, which makes the passage another instance of intermental thought as deduced by Breq. Since focalization seems to move further away from Breq and closer to the other characters involved in it, the passage is also another example of the flexible nature of focalization emphasized by Niederhoff.

All in all, it would seem that Breq has to some extent the "privilege of penetrating the consciousness of the focalized," an ability that Rimmon-Kenan writes about in the context of external focalizers (83). According to her, external focalizers can also choose to portray characters from without only, so that emotions can only be inferred from their external manifestations (83). The way Breq perceives her crew's feelings complicates, however, this external-internal division. The interpretations she makes about the feelings and thoughts of others are based on physical phenomena, on the way feelings are embodied in their experiencers: "I knew Seivarden was in stage two of NREM sleep. I saw pulse, respiration, blood oxygen, hormone levels. Then that data was gone, replaced by Lieutenant Ekalu, standing watch. Stressed—jaw slightly clenched, elevated cortisol" (*AS* 3). Things like oxygen or hormone levels are not external to the body in the same way as, for example, facial expressions, which can be easily perceived by others. Nevertheless, they can still be observed and measured with the right technology, even if present-day medicine or psychology cannot translate these measurements into feelings as readily and precisely as Breq can. Therefore, Breq's seeming ability to penetrate the consciousness of others is actually just a heightened ability to interpret the physical indications and causes of what is happening inside their respective consciousness.

In fact, the way Breq interprets people whose internal data she does not have is at times not that far from how she interprets her own crew:

> The person I'd spoken to in the Undergarden tea shop, yesterday. Her anger was banked, hidden. It flared to life again as she recognized me. Along with, I thought, a trace of fear. "Good morning, Citizen," I said. "What a pleasant surprise to meet you here."
>
> "Good morning, Fleet Captain," she replied, pleasantly. Ostensibly calm and unconcerned, but I could see that very small, nearly invisible tightening of her jaw. (*AS* 130)

Here, the external signs of emotion are strong enough for Breq to make quite intricate interpretations of the state of mind of her interlocutor, even if the person is clearly trying to hide her true feelings. According to Palmer, what he calls *intermental encounters* are actually prevalent in novels, since "a minimal level of mind reading and theory of mind is required for characters to understand each other and thereby make everyday life possible" (*Social* 46–47). By *mind reading* he does not mean any supernatural ability but the everyday interpretations that people, real and fictional, make about each other's thoughts and states of mind, and thus theory of mind, in essence, refers to "our awareness of the existence of other minds" (20). In fact, Palmer argues that much of our thought is actually visible to others, so the ability to know, or guess correctly, what the other is thinking or feeling is nothing extraordinary in itself (*Social* 4; *Fictional* 137–43; see also Zunshine 57–62). Therefore, it could be said that the difference between how Breq interprets her own crew and how she reads other people is just a matter of degree: in the case of the crew she simply has more data on which to base her interpretations, but all that data is nevertheless based on the embodiment of feelings and states of mind. In other words, Breq's involvement with the minds of others seems to form a scale that ranges from interpretations based purely on external data to dual or complex focalization, which in itself extends from a clear dominance by Breq's perspective to almost complete immersion in the experience of other characters.

### 3.2 What It's Like?

In his take on experientiality, David Herman establishes "what it's like" as one of the basic elements of narrative (137–38). According to him, "narrative, unlike other modes of representation […], is uniquely suited to capturing what the world is like from the situated perspective of an experiencing mind" (157). In terms of narrative technique, "the situated perspective" is often established through the use of different modes of focalization, most importantly internal focalization. However, as focalization in the *Imperial Radch* trilogy is not just a formal feature of the text but takes place on the intradiegetic level of the story, it is

not only possible to ask how the world appears through Breq's perspective, but also what it is like to experience the focalization itself. Focalization in turn is intrinsically interwoven with issues such as Breq's identity and her relationship with the people around her, exactly because focalization is literalized as an intradiegetic phenomenon.

According to Farah Mendlesohn, while mainstream fiction is mostly concerned with inter-personal relationships, science fiction is "about our relationship to the world and the universe" (9). That may be true in terms of the majority of the genre, but it does not entirely hold for the *Imperial Radch* trilogy: Liz Bourke, for example, writes in her review of *Ancillary Mercy* that its "real core […] lies in the relationships between the characters" ("Shining"). Furthermore, as my analysis of *Ancillary Justice* shows, the novel is deeply concerned with *Justice of Toren*/One Esk/Breq's identity, its/her relationship with it/herself, even if Hanna-Riikka Roine states that "Breq's identity and status as a character are built and understood in relation to her actions and position inside the fictional world, not so much on the basis of her 'inner world'" (172).

In *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy*, Breq's personal conflict culminates in her having gained something that could potentially make up for the loss of the rest of herself but that still falls short of satisfying her needs. Her connection with *Mercy of Kalr* reminds her of what she used to have and be, but it is questionable whether it can ever be enough:

> A terrible, terrible thing, to deprive a ship of its ancillaries. To deprive an ancillary of its ship. Not, perhaps, as terrible as murdering human beings to make those ancillaries. But a terrible thing nonetheless.
>
> I didn't have the luxury to consider it. I didn't have another, less angry body to send into the meeting with Captain Hetnys. Didn't have an hour, or two, to exercise, or meditate, or drink tea until I was calmer. I only had myself. "It will be alright, Fleet Captain," said *Mercy of Kalr* in my ear, and for a moment I was overwhelmed with the sensation of Ship. The sleeping Etrepas. Lieutenant Ekalu half awake, happy and for once utterly relaxed—Seivarden in the bath, singing to herself, *my mother said it all goes around*, her Amaats, Medic, and my Kalrs, all in one jumbled, inundating moment. Then it was gone—I couldn't hold it, not with only one body, one brain. (*AS* 139)

Writing on *Ancillary Justice*, Roine points out that "Breq's quest is not directed towards being 'more human' but attempting to perform humanity in a way that would help her to reach her goal" (177). Breq does not conform to what Lisa Zunshine calls the *"robot-gone-astray" motif* (52), since she is not interested in replacing her maker, or becoming human, even if she does in fact rebel against Anaander Mianaai. By being confined to one body, she has become

seemingly more human than she used to be, but this is not an improvement from her point of view. On the contrary, she longs for the plural and omniscient existence she used to have as a ship, whereas having just one body means "identity-stripping solitude" for her, as John Clute and David Langford put it. Having access to the data Ship feeds her is "perversely, both comforting and painful" (*AM* 134–35): it alleviates the longing in some ways, but at the same time, it acts as a constant reminder of what has been lost.

Breq is not the only character in the trilogy who has gone through changes that threaten her identity. Seivarden, who has woken up to a world where everyone she used to know is a thousand years dead, and Tisarwat, who has a seventeen-year-old's body, a galactic emperor's memories, and a hybrid personality to match, are two of the more obvious examples. Due to their complexity of focalization, the novels are not exclusively limited to Breq's inner world, but there is also room for the other characters' perspectives, even if they are always subordinate to Breq's. This means that the inner crises of various characters can be more acutely perceived than they would be if focalization were limited to Breq only, which adds to the depth of the story. The following passage, for example, shows the identity crisis Tisarwat is going through:

> Her words distressed Tisarwat for some reason, triggered an overpowering sense of shame and self-loathing. But of course, there was hardly a well-educated Radchaai alive who hadn't written a quantity of poetry in her youth, and I could well imagine the quality of what the younger Tisarwat might have produced. And been proud of. And then seen through the eyes of Anaander Mianaai, three-thousand-year-old Lord of the Radch. I doubted the assessment had been kind. And if she was no longer Anaander Mianaai, what could she ever be but some reassembled version of Tisarwat, with all the bad poetry and frivolity that implied? How could she ever see that in herself without remembering the Lord of the Radch's withering contempt? (*AS* 227)

The perspective is still mostly that of Breq, and the passage is her assessment of Tisarwat's situation, but it also shows how keenly she is able to perceive what Tisarwat must be experiencing, and that she can understand her feelings. Perhaps the analysis is even more perceptive than what Tisarwat could have produced herself, as Breq can view the feelings from a safe distance, whereas Tisarwat must live through them. Breq's position is therefore comparable to a heterodiegetic narrator using psycho-narration to express "in a narrator's knowing words, what a character 'knows,' without knowing how to put it into words" (Cohn 46).

Thus, Breq's having access to the other characters' perspectives offers a broader view of the storyworld, not only by incorporating multiple characters' perceptions in the story but also by offering glimpses of the characters' inner worlds. On the other hand, however, Breq's ability also raises questions of privacy, which are explicitly discussed in the novels itself. McHale notes that eavesdropping and spying are important themes in much realist fiction, and they can be literalized in a new way by speculative fiction and its experimenting with focalization (324). In *Ancillary Mercy*, Breq starts to question her role and actions in surveilling her crew after Tisarwat has confronted her on the issue. Breq starts to wonder whether she has abused her power over the crew, but also whether she has behaved unjustly toward *Mercy of Kalr*. Eventually, she realizes that she has been using Ship as a tool, even if she of all people, and non-people, should know what it feels like to be treated like a piece of equipment. In effect, *Mercy of Kalr* has been for her what McHale calls "a focalization machine" (321), a means to an end:

> I saw that I had relied on Ship's support and obedience—and, yes, its affection—without ever asking what *it* wanted. I had presumed much further than any human captain would have, or could have, unthinkingly demanded to be shown the crew's most intimate moments. I had behaved, in some ways, as though I were in fact part of Ship, but had also demanded—expected, it seemed—a level of devotion that I had no right to demand or expect, and that likely Ship could not give me. (*AM* 133–34, emphasis original)

Breq starts to avoid reaching for the crew's data, but later she understands that she has only been able to do so because Ship has not showed the data to her for a while; she herself cannot control her reaching for it that well, as it is triggered by thought. It is not surprising that Breq has unthinkingly assumed a role that resembles in some ways that of a ship: after all, she has a two-thousand-year experience of being a ship. Nevertheless, as she herself knows, she cannot "*be Mercy of Kalr*, as I had been *Justice of Toren*. Not without losing myself entirely. Permanently" (*AS* 18, emphasis original). After a discussion with Ship about its feelings, which are actually not quite what Breq supposes them to be (as discussed further in chapter 4.1), Ship starts feeding her the data again, and Breq realizes what a relief that is:

> Seivarden warm and close beside me, though the hard edge of the corrective on my arm was poking into her bare shoulder. Not painfully, certainly not uncomfortably enough to disturb her med-stabilized mood, but I shifted slightly, at first not realizing what I'd just done, that I had known what Seivarden was feeling and moved on account of that. Five frowned at me—an actual reflection of her mood, she

> was worried, exasperated, embarrassed. Tired—she hadn't slept much in the last day or so. Ship was feeding me data again, and I'd missed it so much. (*AM* 152–53)

While Breq earlier focused on how the data she receives from the ship is not enough to compensate her loss, now she is able to see how much better than nothing it is and how valuable as such.

Close to the end of *Ancillary Mercy*, it seems that Breq is taking the first steps toward accepting her new existence and the fact that what is gone is really gone. Rather than focusing on what she cannot achieve, she starts to appreciate the special connection she is able to have with her crew and even a more ordinary, or human, way of reaching the others around her: "I leaned against her [Seivarden], and she put her arms around me. No data from her, no connection to Ship that would give it to me, but it felt good anyway" (*AM* 308). She is able to take pleasure from the touch of another person, even if she cannot reach her internal data and so pretend that the other would be a part of her.

The trilogy ends with a final shifting of focalization from one crew member to another:

> No real endings, no final perfect happiness, no irredeemable despair. Meetings, yes, breakfasts and suppers. Five anticipating having the best porcelain out again tomorrow, fretting over whether we had enough tea for the next few days. Tisarwat standing watch aboard *Mercy of Kalr*, Bo One beside her, humming to herself, *Oh, tree, eat the fish*. Etrepa Seven standing guard with ancillary-like impassivity outside a storage compartment Ekalu and Seivarden had commandeered. Utterly unembarrassed by the occasional noise from that compartment. Amused, actually, and relieved that at least this one thing was the way she thought it should be. Amaat Two and Four, both helping with the Undergarden repair crew, singing, together but not realizing it, slightly out of phase with each other, *My mother said it all goes around, the ship goes around the station, it all goes around*.
>
> I said to Uran, "That should do. Let's go in and have supper."
>
> In the end it's only ever been one step, and then the next. (*AM* 328)

Like the new republic that has just been formed, Breq's search for a sustainable identity is still a work in progress, but a hopeful start has already been made. Besides the idea that the end of the novel is not the end of the story for Breq, the passage focuses on the people Breq has around her. Identity is not just an individual's private matter but, as Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning point out, socially and culturally dependent (8). Thus, Breq's recognition of what the people and AIs around her mean to her and her acceptance of the other's love for her are important steps toward her finding her place and self. Breq may have lost the majority of

herself, but it would be wrong to say that she only has herself now, as she has a ship and a whole crew of people with whom she can share a deep connection. She used to be able to perform choral music by herself, but now she has others with whom to sing.

## 3.3 Concluding Remarks

*Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy* continue the literalization of narratological phenomena that began in *Ancillary Justice* by moving from literal omniscience to literalized variable internal focalization. Breq, the protagonist and narrator, retains focalization to some extent throughout, but other characters' perspectives, emotions, and thoughts are embedded in it to a varying degree. Accordingly, the varieties of focalization present in the two novels range from almost complete control by Breq to nearly full immersion in another consciousness. This shows how flexible focalization can be as a textual phenomenon and how its possibilities can be explored in a science fictional context. While the omniscience in *Ancillary Justice* is part of *Justice of Toren*'s consciousness and experience of the world, in *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy*, variable focalization becomes part of Breq's experience. Focalization is therefore linked with Breq's longing for her past identity and the hesitant search for a new one. The interconnection between literalized focalization and the plot goes one step further in the last novel of the trilogy, as issues related to privacy and abuse that arise from focalization are explored.

## 4. Unreliability and Other Ways of Limiting Information

In this chapter, I examine phenomena related to how information is made available or is unavailable to readers in the *Imperial Radch* trilogy. The first subchapter focuses on unreliable narration, and the second one concerns ways of limiting information that are related to focalization. The most prominent of such limitations in the trilogy is the omission of gender, which is related to Breq, a gender blind AI, being the main focalizer of the story and thus almost the only source readers have on the gender of characters. In addition, I broaden the discussion to other social categories, which, in contrast to gender, serve as a basis for discrimination in the Radchaai society. I also point out how these distinctions seem to be related to focalization, even if the connection is less direct than in the case of gender.

### 4.1 Breq as an Unreliable Narrator

According to Rimmon-Kenan, one of the features which can be used in the analysis of narrators is their degree of reliability (97). Even if Breq certainly does not appear to be completely untrustworthy, she is an unreliable narrator to some degree. The effect of slight unreliability, or perhaps rather the lack of complete reliability, arises mainly from Breq not always knowing quite as much she thinks she knows and her occasionally leaving some details out of the narration.

James Phelan distinguishes between six types of unreliability: *misreporting*, *misreading*, *misregarding*, *underreporting*, *underreading*, and *underregarding*. These are derived from the three main roles of narrators: reporting, which happens on the axis of characters, facts, and events; reading, which happens on the axis of knowledge and perception; and regarding, which happens on the axis of ethics and evaluation. The difference between the kinds of unreliability with the prefixes “mis-” and “under-” is that in the former, readers reject the narrator’s words altogether, whereas in the latter, they accept the narrator’s account but supplement it (*Living* 50–52). Breq’s unreliability as a narrator consists mainly of two types: misreading and underreporting. Phelan points out that the types of unreliability often interact and occur simultaneously (53). However, in what follows, I first discuss instances of underreporting, followed by misreading, which is divided into two parts: first, Breq misreading other people, and second, herself. This is because the effects of underreporting and misreading in the novels are for the most part quite different from each other, and they serve different purposes within the narrative.

Breq's underreporting consists mainly of withholding relevant information, just hinting at things about which she clearly knows more than she says, and refusing to report her feelings. During much of *Ancillary Justice*, for example, readers do not know what Breq actually is after, even if it is clear that she is on some kind of mission. At the beginning of the third chapter of the novel, Breq rents a vehicle called a flier, but does not reveal where she is headed. Rather, she only mentions that the story she gives to the owner, visiting a herding camp, is "an outright lie" (*AJ* 27). Later, she reveals that it is the home of the doctor Arilesperas Strigan she is hoping to reach and that Strigan possesses some kind of artifact that she wants: "Something that had led Strigan to flee, to disappear, leaving nearly everything she owned behind, perhaps. Something dangerous, something she couldn't bring herself to destroy, to be rid of in the most efficient way possible. Something I wanted really badly" (*AJ* 35). When Breq arrives at Strigan's house and finds it empty, she simply comments that "[b]arring a miracle, it was the end of nineteen years of planning and effort" (*AJ* 40), without mentioning what she has actually been planning for or delving any deeper into the disappointment and frustration she must be feeling. The narration thus reveals Breq's purpose and motives only little by little as the story unfolds, and as discussed in section 2.3, the full extent of her motivation is evident only after the analepses end at about two thirds into the novel.

Delaying the communication of various important pieces of information in this way is obviously a device for creating suspense. It creates temporary gaps in the text, and as Rimmon-Kenan observes, a gap "always enhances interest and curiosity" (133). Phelan distinguishes between *disclosure functions*, the reporting that happens along the track from the narrator to the authorial audience (the hypothetical audience that understands the text perfectly), and *narrator functions*, the reporting from the narrator to the narratee (*Living* 12). In other words, according to Phelan, "character narration is an art of indirection because the implied author must use the narrator to communicate with the authorial audience and the narrator is unaware of that audience" (215). The underreporting in *Ancillary Justice* is clearly motivated by the disclosure functions: it is not so much Breq who wants to withhold the information, but Leckie who wants to avoid excessive exposition and make the narration more suspenseful and captivating by revealing the information only gradually.

In addition, however, the underreporting supports the characterization of Breq: she is hard to read, focuses on the action at hand rather than the underlying motives, and unemotional, or at least disinclined to show much of her feelings. All in all, the underreporting in *Ancillary Justice* does not make Breq seem unreliable in the sense that

readers would have trouble trusting her report. Rather, the underreporting fits the kind of character she seems to be, at least initially. Furthermore, along with the dual storyline structure of the novel, it creates suspense and draws attention to the details that are only hinted at, such as the gun, which turns out to play a major role in the novel and the entire trilogy.

Another example of Breq withholding information occurs at the beginning of *Ancillary Sword*. Breq repeatedly hints that there is something wrong with Lieutenant Tisarwat, without specifying further what she means. When she talks about Tisarwat with the ship's medic, she replies to Medic's comment on Tisarwat appearing stressed and anxious as follows: "'Perfectly normal under the circumstances,' I agreed, but I meant something different" and comments that "Medic didn't seem to have come to any conclusions. Much less the one I'd come to" (*AS* 30). Further on, she repeatedly alludes to a suspicion she has, still without explaining her thoughts:

> I so very much wanted my suspicions not to be true. (*AS* 33)
>
> *Mercy of Kalr* didn't ask me why I was angry. Didn't ask me what was wrong. That in and of itself suggested that my suspicions were correct. I wished, for the first time in my two-thousand-year life, that I was given to swearing. (*AS* 35)
>
> But I couldn't possibly explain my reasons to anyone, not now, and I hoped I would never be able to. Never have to. But I had hoped, from the beginning, that this situation would not arise at all. (*AS* 38)

The situation is not clarified until Breq squarely confronts Tisarwat about the issue: Tisarwat is not Tisarwat at all but Anaander Mianaai, who has taken over her body by inserting ancillary implants into her brain. The situation is similar to the one in *Ancillary Justice* in that the underreporting and the gap created by it cause suspense. The repeated references to her suspicion furthermore enhance the impression that the issue which is troubling Breq is something momentous. So does the claim that Breq would like to swear when she normally prefers to stay impassive. The underreporting also dovetails with the plot by underlining the issue that Breq cannot reveal her suspicions to anyone, not even indirectly, without revealing her fears to Mianaai, who has the unwilling *Mercy of Kalr* under her control. Even thinking about the situation too openly, as it were, might give away too much because while *Mercy of Kalr* cannot read minds, it can interpret Breq's emotions in the same way as Breq can read the crew. Fittingly, the repeated allusions to the issue and the omission of an explanation make it

seem as if Breq tried to avoid thinking about the matter too directly but cannot stop her thoughts from circling back to it. Therefore, given all the secrecy that is involved here, it is apt that Breq does not disclose her thoughts even to readers.

Besides underreporting, another type of unreliability present in the trilogy is misreading. A major example of this is how Breq's interpretations about other characters' emotions are not always correct, despite her access to the internal data of some of the characters. Especially some of the feelings others have toward her seem to be difficult for Breq to interpret correctly. As Kalr Five, or possibly *Mercy of Kalr* speaking through her, puts it: "you're not used to being loved. You're used to people being attached to you. Or being fond of you. Or depending on you. Not loving you, not really. So I think it doesn't occur to you that it's something that might actually happen" (*AM* 152). Both Seivarden and *Mercy of Kalr* are in love with Breq, but she does not realize this before they express it openly to her. Even with the access to Seivarden's internal data, she is unable to see how deep feelings Seivarden has for her: "'Seivarden doesn't love me,' I said. 'She's grateful that I saved her life, and I'm pretty much the only connection she has with everything she's lost'" (*AM* 152). This is so despite the fact that some signs of Seivarden having a crush on Breq are already visible in *Ancillary Justice*: Seivarden, for example, agrees quite ungrudgingly to pose as her servant and even takes on the associated duties although Breq does not expect that of her. Moreover, when the two are brought before Anaander Mianaai, she refuses to leave Breq's side, even if Mianaai has just revealed to her that Breq is an ancillary, and Breq and Mianaai both tell her to leave.

When it comes to *Mercy of Kalr*'s feelings, Breq is even more clueless than in the case of Seivarden. While she seems to think she knows Seivarden, *Mercy of Kalr* is more of an enigma to her, since she does not have any privileged access to its psyche: "I found myself wishing I could see better what Ship was thinking or feeling, or that it would be plainer with me about what it felt" (*AM* 113). At the beginning of *Ancillary Mercy*, *Mercy of Kalr* asks through Seivarden whether Breq really meant it when she said that *Mercy of Kalr* could be its own captain. The ship confesses that it likes the idea that it could be a captain, even if it does not actually want to be one. This catches Breq off her guard:

> Had I thought that my ship would feel about me the way I had felt about my own captains? Impossible that it would. Ships didn't feel that way about other ships. Had I thought that? Why would I ever think that? […]

> But of course, Seivarden was entirely human. And she was *Mercy of Kalr*'s Amaat lieutenant. Perhaps Ship's words hadn't been meant for me, but for her. […]
>
> All those weeks ago on Omaugh Palace, I had told Ship that it could be a person who could command itself. And now it was telling me—and, not incidentally I was sure, Seivarden—that it wanted to be that, at least potentially. Wanted that to be acknowledged. Wanted, maybe, some small return (or at least some recognition) of its feelings. (*AM* 7)

Breq is correct in her interpretation that *Mercy of Kalr* wants its feelings to be acknowledged, but Ship's words are not directed toward Seivarden but Breq herself. In addition, Breq's questioning her previous thoughts ("Had I thought that?"), as well as her eagerness to deny them ("Why would I ever think that?"), implies that she actually has thought, or at least assumed without really thinking about it, that Ship would be fond of her like of a human captain. She pushes these thoughts away, however, by rationalizing that it is impossible for *Mercy of Kalr* to be genuinely attached to another ship and assumes that its words have to be directed toward a human, in this case Seivarden.

Later on, after further pondering on Ship's words, Breq's conclusion is almost the exact opposite of what Ship actually meant:

> But perhaps it was also saying something to me. Perhaps I hadn't been much different from Seivarden, looking desperately for someone else to shore myself up with. And maybe Ship had found it didn't want to be that for me. Or found that it couldn't. That would be perfectly understandable. Ships, after all, didn't love other ships. (*AM* 134)

Here Breq is more insightful and open about her own actions and feelings than above, and as discussed in chapter 3.2, she realizes how she has taken Ship for granted, and even abused the privileges of being a captain. However, in relation to what *Mercy of Kalr* is feeling, she is even worse off the track than before: initially she thought that Ship wanted Seivarden, instead of herself, to reciprocate its feelings, but now she believes that Ship's words were an outright rejection of her.

Breq's inability to see the others' love for her boils down to her not comprehending that the others really can see her as a person. She thinks that *Mercy of Kalr* cannot love her because ships do not love other ships, or their own ancillaries, but their captains or lieutenants, as One Esk loved Lieutenant Awn. *Mercy of Kalr*, however, sees the bounds of a ship's love a little differently: "maybe it isn't that ships don't love other ships. Maybe it's that ships love people who could be captains. It's just, no ships have ever been

able to be captains before" (*AM* 152). Another example of Breq's inability to see the others' respect for and fondness of her is that she does not believe that *Mercy of Kalr* and its crew will return to save her when her mission against Mianaai's ships leaves her floating alone in empty space: "Wondering if they would come back for me, when that was stupid, I had ordered Ekalu to see to the safety of the ship and the crew, not mine. I would have to reprimand her if she disregarded that" (*AM* 145). Breq still identifies as a ship and as an ancillary, and she cannot see, or does not want to admit, that the others do not view her in a similar light, but genuinely have deep feelings for her and see her as an individual in her own right, not as a replaceable piece of equipment.

It may be hard for readers to detect the instances of Breq misreading the situation, since she is usually so adept at reading other people's emotions and interpreting them. In a way, the fact that she can access so much of other characters' consciousnesses can mislead readers to think that she actually sees everything and is always correct in her interpretations. Furthermore, as Breq is the sole narrator of the story, readers do not have much against which to gauge the correctness of her interpretations. Thus, it may only be in retrospect that her mistakes are revealed. The misreading being so subtle makes it not only harder to detect but easier to understand and accept. Readers can see the reasoning behind Breq's incorrect interpretations, and if they can accept those interpretations as true for a while, it is no wonder that Breq herself falls for her own logic.

It is not only the people around her, however, whom Breq misreads. Rather, she sometimes misreads herself as well because she does not know herself as well as she thinks she does. The most prominent example of this is her claim that she still has the ancillary ability to be completely expressionless when she wants to. She, for instance, claims that "my mood never reached my voice unless I intended it" (*AS* 58) and "my facial expressions weren't at all involuntary" (*AS* 195). She also mentions at several points that maintaining human expression on her face is a task for her, whereas the blank ancillary face is what comes naturally to her. For example, when confronting Anaander Mianaai at the end of *Ancillary Justice*, she narrates: "'*Justice of Toren* One Esk,' I corrected, dropping all pretense of a Gerentate accent, or human expression. I was done pretending. It was terrifying, because I knew I couldn't live long past this, but also, oddly, a relief. A weight gone" (*AJ* 332). Notwithstanding, especially Seivarden seems to be able to read her face and tone of voice to some degree, as the following exchange shows:

> "Were any of the ships you served on particularly fond of you?" I asked, voice carefully even. Neutral.

> She blinked. Straightened. “That’s an odd question. Do you have any experience with ships?”
>
> “Yes,” I said. “Actually.”
>
> “Ships are always attached to their Captains.” […]
>
> “But it doesn’t matter, does it? Ships aren’t people, and they’re made to serve you, to be attached, as you put it.”
>
> Seivarden frowned. “Now you’re angry. You’re very good at hiding it, but you’re angry.” (*AJ* 224–25)

Breq claims that she keeps her voice calm, but Seivarden nevertheless notices her anger, even if the cause of it is far from clear to her: she cannot know that ships and their feelings are a sensitive topic for Breq, as she does not yet know who, or what, she is. Seivarden also comments on Breq being good at hiding her emotions. She is not perfect, however, or Seivarden would not have been able to detect that she is angry.

There is also at least one instance of Breq crying, which is clearly an example of the involuntary expression of emotion. The passage in question is actually an example of underreporting, but I will analyze it here because of its thematical relevance to the present discussion. Initially, Breq does not directly mention that she is crying, but it is obvious enough from Kalr Five wiping her eyes thrice during the passage and finally asking what is causing the tears:

> “Why are you still crying?”
>
> Helpless to stop myself, I made a small, hiccupping sob. “My leg.” Five was genuinely puzzled. “Why did it have to be the good one? And not the one that hurts me all the time?” (*AM* 153).

Breq has recently lost a leg, and not just any leg but “the good one,” which could amount to a good reason for crying, except that thanks to the Radchaai medical technology, the limb will grow back within weeks, and as Breq herself points out, she has “lost far more than a single more or less easily replaceable leg, far more permanently, and lived, and continued to function, or at least seemed to for anyone who didn’t look too closely” (*AM* 148).

Therefore, it seems likely that Breq’s suddenly uncontrollable emotions are due to something more than just the leg, making the passage an example of not only underreporting, as evidenced by Breq downplaying her crying, but also one of her underreading herself. In fact, in the span of about five pages, Breq has the “unaccountably upsetting” thought that she should be dead by now, as ancillaries with injuries like hers are normally “disposed of” (*AM* 148), learns about Seivarden’s and *Mercy of Kalr*’s true feelings

for her as discussed above in this chapter, and receives access to the internal data of the others after a long break, the emotional significance of which is discussed in section 3.2. This suggests that the loss of the leg is not the only reason for Breq to express her emotions in such an uncharacteristically visible way: she underreads herself in that she fails to recognize the depth of what actually might be making her cry.

All in all, Breq seems to think that she is still as expressionless as she used to be when she was an ancillary of *Justice of Toren*. Back then, she used to have thousands of bodies, and so the emotions of a single body were just a drop in the ocean. Now that her manner of embodiment has changed drastically, it seems that her emotions have a more profound effect on her, and she cannot control them as well as she used to. In addition, she does not realize, or at least consciously acknowledge, how much she has changed, thinking that she still has full control of when and how she expresses her emotions. It is not completely clear whether Breq really does not realize her changes or just refuses to acknowledge them, or, in other words, whether her misreading is plain obliviousness or self-deception. It seems likely, however, that she is at least at some level aware of her changes. She is constantly mindful of how limited her existence is compared with what she used to have as *Justice of Toren*, and so it is somewhat unlikely that she would not notice this part of her change at all. Furthermore, given how perceptive she is normally, she should be able to detect the contradiction present in situations such as the following: "I was sure my expression hadn't changed, but Seivarden had noticed something" (*AJ* 282). Therefore, it would seem that Breq deceives herself by refusing to acknowledge the changes in how, and to which degree, she expresses her emotions.

Nevertheless, there are also instances where Breq actually is remarkably expressionless and calm, as evidenced not only by her own account but as witnessed by others:

> "Do you know, Emer said you were like ice that day." The woman who ran the tea shop, in the Undergarden, that was. "That translator shot right in front of you, dying under your hands, blood everywhere, and you collected and dispassionate, not a sign of any of it in your voice or your face. She said you turned around and asked her for tea."
>
> "I hadn't had breakfast yet."
>
> Sirix laughed, a short, sharp *hah*. "She said she thought the bowl would freeze solid when you touched it." (*AS* 233–34)

It seems that in situations such as the one described in the passage above, namely, in the presence of violence, Breq is indeed able to keep her countenance just as well as ever, and just as well as she imagines. In fact, she may have acted here even more expressionlessly than she intended to, as when she asks for the tea, Breq remarks that "[i]t took extra effort not to speak in my flat, ancillary's voice" (*AS* 159). Violence is something that Breq is used to handling, after all she has spent two thousand years as a machine of war, but dealing with her own mortality and the feelings others have for her is not something she would have had to worry much about as a ship. Therefore, it is not surprising that such situations would evoke more uncontrollable feelings in her, and given her reluctance to let go of her past, it is no wonder that she is unwilling to admit that she does not function like a ship anymore.

According to Phelan, most works on unreliability have focused on what he calls *estranging* unreliability, but unreliability can also be *bonding* in that it "reduces the distance between the narrator and the authorial audience" ("Estranging" 223–24). In other words, the fact that a narrator is unreliable does not automatically antagonize readers toward the narrator. Breq's unreliability may actually make her more relatable as a character, as it shows that she is not all-knowing or completely rational. In fact, having trouble understanding or interpreting one's own feelings, and more generally simply making mistakes, is a very human feature. Her unreliability does not make readers to distrust her, but rather it shows that she is not perfect, just as human beings are not perfect.

### 4.2 Gender and Other Arbitrary Distinctions

Perhaps the most significant, or at least the most striking, information that is missing from the novels concerns the gender of the characters. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the main tools for achieving this omission is using the female third person pronoun for all characters. This does not imply that all the characters are female, but that the pronoun is used as a kind of a default and as a conventional way of rendering the supposedly truly neutral pronoun the Radchaai use. Leckie herself justifies her pronoun choice by wanting to highlight the ways in which the male is still used as default: "If I had used 'he,' chances are no one would have even noticed, and the book would have read more or less identically to the mass of space operas that are already largely populated by male characters" ("Q&A"). Other linguistic elements cannot be used to infer the gender either: only female or gender-neutral terms are used when describing family relations (mother, sister, niece; parent, cousin), while honorifics are always masculine (sir, lord). Characters' appearance is often described

minimally and never as exhaustively enough as to give any definitive cues about the biological sex of a character. For example, System Governor Giarod is described as "tall and broad shouldered" (*AS* 111), which may suggest masculinity but is not conclusive evidence of her being male.

The purpose of the ambiguously gendered language is to reflect the Radchaai language and culture, in which gender is viewed as inconsequential, if not non-existent:

> She was probably male, to judge from the angular mazelike patterns quilting her shirt. I wasn't entirely certain. It wouldn't have mattered, if I had been in Radch space. Radchaai don't care much about gender, and the language they speak—my own first language—doesn't mark gender in any way. This language we were speaking now did, and I could make trouble for myself if I used the wrong forms. (*AJ* 3)

As the passage shows, Breq is gender blind to the degree that she has trouble discerning it, even in a non-Radchaai cultural context where it is deemed necessary. Accordingly, the omission of information on the characters' gender arises from the text being focalized by Breq, who most of the time does not know, or care, what sex or gender the people around her are. It is a part of how she perceives and experiences the world. Thus, if the trilogy were focalized through a character that sees gender as a relevant distinction, the effect would be vastly different. Shortly after arriving at Omaugh Station, Breq is momentarily able to adopt such a non-Radchaai perspective:

> I saw them all, suddenly, for just a moment, through non-Radchaai eyes, an eddying crowd of unnervingly ambiguously gendered people. I saw all the features that would mark gender for non-Radchaai—never, to my annoyance and inconvenience, the same way in each place. Short hair or long, worn unbound (trailing down a back, or in a thick, curled nimbus) or bound (braided, pinned, tied). Thick-bodied or thin-, faces delicate-featured or coarse-, with cosmetics or none. A profusion of colors that would have been gender-marked in other places. All of this matched randomly with bodies curving at breast and hip or not, bodies that one moment moved in ways various non-Radchaai would call feminine, the next moment masculine. Twenty years of habit overtook me, and for an instant I despaired of choosing the right pronouns, the right terms of address. But I didn't need to do that here. I could drop that worry, a small but annoying weight I had carried all this time. (*AJ* 283)

While Breq has difficulties discerning gender outside the Radch territory, for a non-Radchaai, the Radchaai culture itself poses a similar problem. The difference is that for Breq the difficulty is purely practical, since she could not care less about what gender someone is, but

in order not to appear rude or ignorant, she has to pay attention to the various gendered addresses and terms used in the non-Radchaai languages. The non-Radchaai among the ambiguously gendered Radchaai, however, could face similar difficulties as the readers of the novels: the confusion is caused by not being able to assign people into the categories one is used to.

Gérard Genette defines focalization as a restriction on the information available to readers (*Narrative* 185–86; *Revisited* 74) and *paralipsis* as an infraction where less is told than the choice of focalization would require (*Narrative* 195), roughly equivalent to Phelan's underreporting. The omission of gender does not amount to paralipsis in the proper sense that less would be told than the focalizer knows, as usually Breq genuinely does not have that information. Nevertheless, from the readers' point of view, omitting the gender may seem like "giving less information than is necessary in principle" (Genette, *Narrative* 195), as humans are used to gendering people, real and fictional, and gender may seem like an indispensable part of information for characterizing someone. In other words, as Marion Gymnich expresses it:

> Gender is beyond doubt one of the central categories operating in the cognitive processes that govern both the perception of human beings and the construction of fictional characters. On the most basic level, this means that readers typically strive to categorize fictional characters consistently as either male or female, even if the textual data on which such a categorization can possibly be based appears to be deficient. (506)

Therefore, it is no wonder that some readers have had trouble accepting the omission of the information on gender: one of the frequently asked questions listed on Leckie's official website is: "what gender is [Character]?" (brackets original). It would seem that some readers see the missing gender as a mystery that they need to solve. As Jens Eder et al. write, however, if a text does not offer information on a certain property of a character, "this property is simply lacking in the fictional world," and readers have "no opportunity to fill this gap in a way that would allow [them] to consider it an item of reliable knowledge" (11–12). Therefore, even if from the readers' point of view the textual data in *Imperial Radch* may appear deficient, from the story-internal perspective of Breq, the omission of gender is not a significant one. What for readers seems to be odd, is for Breq a completely natural way of seeing the world. Thus, focalization through Breq invites readers to challenge their notions of what is actually a natural way of viewing the world and the people inhabiting it.

Writing about Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, one of the most famous examples of androgyny in science fiction, Brian Attebery notes that the novel's narrator, a male Terran, "is able to articulate all the reader's objections […] and thereby defuse them," but him being the "controlling consciousness" of the text is also what facilitated the novel's good reception among the male readership back in 1969 (130–31). Commenting on her own work about twenty years after its writing, Le Guin herself admitted that it offered "a safe trip into androgyny and back, from a conventionally male viewpoint" (16). *Imperial Radch* does not offer readers such a safe viewpoint, apart from some comments by Arilesperas Strigan and Breq's brief adoption of a non-Radchaai perspective discussed above. By and large, however, gender is seen through a perspective that is foreign to most, if not all, readers: to use Attebery's turn of phrase, the controlling consciousness in the text is a gender blind AI. As Hanna-Riikka Roine observes, readers initially encounter the strangeness of this perspective, but as the reading process advances, the novels may make readers question the naturalness of how they categorize people: "is it not strange that we can (and want to) distinguish gender of the people we meet? This way, a process, which we have internalised so well that it has become automatic or downright natural, becomes a source for a sense of wonder during the process of reading the novel" (174–75). Rather than keep on trying to guess the gender of characters, it is more fruitful to accept the gaps as they are and Breq's perspective as a valid way of seeing the world she lives in.

Commenting on Breq's gender, Roine states that it is "completely opaque" (158). While it is true that Breq never specifies her gender, or even the sex of her body, and references to what she looks like are few and far between, there is one hint right at the beginning of the trilogy as to how a non-Radchaai person categorizes the body she inhabits: a patron of a tavern calls her mockingly "a tough little girl" (*AJ* 2). This categorization is confirmed by Leckie's short story "She Commands Me and I Obey," set in the years between the destruction of *Justice of Toren* and beginning of the more recent storyline of *Ancillary Justice*. There Breq, then known as Sister Ultimately-Justice-Shall-Prevail, is unambiguously identified as female. However, Breq is indeed agender in the sense that she does not identify as either male or female. As the Radchaai do not see gender as a significant distinction, they would not bother assigning one to their ships. Furthermore, the fact that the body Breq is left with happens to be outwardly female to the non-Radchaai eye is not much more than a coincidence: *Justice of Toren*'s thousands of ancillaries in all probability included bodies belonging to both sexes. All in all, gender is not a relevant category for Breq in terms of how she views the people around her, and neither is it one in terms of her own identity.

Nevertheless, the fact that Breq has a female body can be seen as another feature that undercuts the male default and questions gender stereotypes, as many of Breq's qualities, such as her inexpressiveness, dexterity with guns, and readiness for violence, read as stereotypically masculine rather than feminine.

While the Radchaai do not distinguish people by gender, other distinctions that can lead to discrimination thrive in their society. Social class, for example, is deemed significant: Lieutenant Awn is seen as an upstart by many because her parents are cooks, and it is customary for the Radchaai to wear decorative pins, which signal family relationships and patronage, among other things. Even more important, however, is the distinction between Radchaai and non-Radchaai itself. The word Radchaai means 'civilized,' making it virtually impossible to even talk about any civilization that is not Radchaai: "'The Athoeki weren't very civilized.' Not civilized. Not *Radchaai*. The word was the same, the only difference a subtlety expressed by context, and too easily wiped away" (*AS* 83–84, emphasis original). The distinction even goes so far that the word Radchaai can become interchangeable not only with civilization, but humanness itself: "to most Radchaai, *human* was who they were, and everyone else was…something other" (*AS* 123, emphasis original). In fact, the whole Radchaai society and economy is based on the colonialist annexations, in other words bringing civilization to the hapless uncivilized peoples, who barely even count as people.

Yet another matter are the actual alien species, which include the Presger, the Geck, and the Rrrrrr, and count as truly different from all humans. For example, all the quirks of the Presger translators, who are humans bred by the Presger so as to be able to communicate with the Radch, are presumably just a foretaste of what the actual Presger are like. From Breq's position, however, the most important distinction is the one made between the humans and the nonhuman AIs, the stations and the ships, that are ranked even further away from humanity than any non-Radchaai people. While people from foreign cultures fall under a vague "something other," the AI are firmly placed into the category of equipment, even if the line between human and nonhuman is not actually as clear-cut as the Radchaai would have it. The ancillaries are humans turned into parts of an AI by brain surgery and implants, but not all Radchaai citizens are equipped only with what they were born with either: it is common to have "optical and auditory implants," for example (*AJ* 288). Anaander Mianaai takes such augmentation much further, and in fact her multiple bodies make her quite similar to the ships with their ancillaries. Mianaai herself admits that she and Breq share "a similarity of background" (*AS* 4), and her splitting into factions is not that different from what

happened to *Justice of Toren* and One Esk. Thus, the line between human and nonhuman is actually much vaguer than most Radchaai would acknowledge.

Translator Zeiat gives an illustration of how arbitrary, but also powerful, such distinctions can be. Having demonstrated her point by arranging cakes with and without fruit into different constellations, she goes on with her display:

> She reached over and took a counter from the game board.
>
> No cheating, Translator," said *Sphene*. Calm and pleasant.
>
> "I'll put it back," Translator Zeiat protested, and then set the counter down among the cakes. "They were different—you accept, don't you, that they were different before?—but now they are the same."
>
> "I suspect the counter doesn't taste as good as the cakes," said *Sphene*.
>
> "That would be a matter of opinion," Translator Zeiat said, just the smallest bit primly. "Besides, it *is* a cake now." She frowned. "Or are the cakes counters now?"
>
> "I don't think so, Translator," I said. "Not either way." Carefully I stood up from my chair.
>
> "Ah, Fleet Captain, that's because you can't see my imaginary line. But it's real." She tapped her forehead. "It exists." She took one of the date cakes, and set it on the game board where the counter had been. "See, I told you I'd put it back." (*AM* 208, emphasis original)

As Zeiat rather pointedly, if somewhat eccentrically, demonstrates, the divisions used to distinguish people from each other, or even humans from nonhumans, are in the end "imaginary lines," but while these lines do not exist in the external reality, they do exist in people's minds, and this means that they are far from powerless. In other words, these categorizations are a matter of perspective, and importantly, a matter of who is allowed to draw the line, and what kind of perspective is generally accepted. These imaginary lines can even be seen as one of the most important themes of the trilogy, as Liz Bourke points out in her article: "From a certain angle, the Ancillary trilogy—and certainly *Ancillary Mercy*—is about the permeability of categories taken to be separate, and about the mutability, and yes the permeability too, of identities" ("Politics").

Breq is able to use the malleability of categorizations to her own advantage at the end of *Ancillary Mercy* by adopting a new perspective on what it means to an AI and what the dividing line that is seen between them and humans signifies:

> "You've seen me deal with the humans in this system, seen them work with me." And against me. "As far as the humans here are concerned, I might as well be human. But I'm not. That being the case,

> there's no question in my mind that we AIs are not only a separate species from humans, but also Significant." […]
>
> "If I am just a possession," I put in, "just a piece of equipment, how could I hold any sort of command? And yet I clearly do. And how could I have a house name? The same, in fact"—I turned to address the tyrant—"as yours, Cousin Anaander." (*AM* 304–5)

Breq turns her nonhumanness from a disadvantage to an advantage by concluding that if humans and AIs are as distinct from each other as the humans would have, they must belong to two different species, and because AIs cooperate so closely with humans and humans are already recognized as Significant, the AIs must be Significant as well. What it actually means to be Significant is left vague, the concept being something that only the Presger understand, but it is distinct from personhood, as Zeiat tries to explain to Mianaai: "this business about being a person, that's apparently so important to you, it means nothing to *them*. They wouldn't understand it, no matter how much you tried to explain. They certainly don't consider it necessary for Significance" (*AM* 310, emphasis original). It is of course not the compelling logic of Breq's words as such that makes Mianaai retreat, but the threat posed by the unpredictable and potentially destructive Presger, which Breq can use as a shield since hostilities between any Significant species violate the treaty made with them. Her perspective is useful only because it potentially has the power of the Presger behind it, which illustrates how perspective, social categorizations, and power are interconnected. It is also another demonstration of the arbitrariness of categorization, as the most powerful category turns out to be one that most of the characters cannot even define.

It is clear that what happens at the end of *Ancillary Mercy* is a major shift of perspective within the storyworld, and so it can even be seen as a literalized shift in focalization, more specifically in the ideological facet of focalization. Boris Uspensky defines the ideological facet as "a general system of viewing the world conceptually" (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 83). Breq's reformulation of what it means to be an AI is a change in such a general system. While there is formally no shift in focalization in the sense that the focalizer would change, there is an obvious change in how the characters view, or are forced to view, the storyworld, and this shift also causes tangible effects in how the story proceeds. As already pointed out in section 3.2, identity is socially and culturally dependent, and thus Breq's actions can be likened to what Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning call "[t]he reflective modification of culturally prevailing narratives," which can "open up space in which stigmatized groups can renegotiate and reconstruct their identity" (10). Accordingly,

Breq's redefinition allows the AI characters, including herself, to view themselves in way that was not socially acceptable before.

In addition, the shift functions as a final signal of how much Breq has changed after the destruction of *Justice of Toren* and during the trilogy. At the beginning of *Ancillary Justice*, she still finds it hard "not to have orders to follow from one moment to the next" (*AJ* 1), whereas now she is capable of overturning the accustomed ideology of an empire and banishing its supreme ruler on whose orders she ultimately used to rely. Even as Breq redefines the generally accepted categories, she also redefines herself and her own identity, taking her place as an individual equal to the other individuals around her. Perhaps it is wrong to say that Breq has become a person since as the narrator and focalizer of her own story, she has from the beginning seemed like a person: a conscious being with an identity of her own. She really would not want to be called human either, but maybe it is safe to say that she has become Significant. In the end, being Significant is what matters as it ensures that one cannot be treated like a tool but deserves at least a basic level of respect.

## 4.3 Concluding Remarks

Breq is a subtly unreliable narrator: while her reporting can mostly be trusted, she underreports at times and misreads others' emotions and herself. The main function of Breq's underreporting seems to be to create suspense, but as my analysis shows, it also contributes to the characterization of Breq and tallies with the plot. Breq's misreading, on the other hand, makes her seem more relatable as a character rather than untrustworthy. Despite her ability to perceive others' feelings and her seeming rationality, she struggles with issues that are not all that foreign to humans, for example, accepting the genuine love others have for her, or making sense of her own feelings.

Besides unreliable narration, another way of limiting the information available to readers is brought about by the focalization through the gender blind Breq. In most cases, readers have no way of knowing the gender of a character, and so Breq's perspective naturalizes the genderless society, which would seem strange from a more conventional point of view. As the novels portray the way in which Breq experiences the storyworld, it is more constructive to accept her perspective than to fight against it by keeping on guessing what gender a character might be. In addition to gender, other social distinctions in the novels can also be connected to focalization, as they depend on perspective. In other words, the novels suggest that the boundaries seen between different groups are imaginary, if also powerful, and

can be manipulated. Thus, Breq's success in turning the dividing line between human and nonhuman into her own advantage can be seen as a literal shift in the ideological facet of focalization.

## 5. Conclusion

The *Imperial Radch* trilogy is a prime example of how speculative fiction can literalize narratological concepts such as omniscience and focalization. Importantly, none of the features that literalize traditional notions of narrative theory are mere structural gimmicks in the novels. Rather, they are an integral part of the story itself precisely because they are literalized and thus take place in the storyworld, not just on the level of discourse. This means that phenomena such as omniscience and variable internal focalization are not only literalized but also experienced and embodied by *Justice of Toren*/One Esk/Breq. Thus, *Justice of Toren*'s omniscience, the shifts in focalization that take place between it and One Esk, and Breq's access to other characters' internal data are all related to form, but also to the story and how the protagonist's identity and relationships to other characters develop during the series. However, the consequences of literalized omniscience and variable internal focalization are not discussed in the novels only from Breq's perspective. Rather, the novels also take explicitly into account the ethical relevance of issues such as privacy and possible abuse when it comes to how Breq surveils the private lives of her crew and treats the ship *Mercy of Kalr*. In other words, the literal focalization in the story has tangible consequences that go beyond the character of Breq.

The literalization of narratological concepts in the trilogy is to a large extent enabled by how Breq as a character exists at the boundary between human and nonhuman, and thus the narrative devices utilized through the series reflect the development of Breq's identity. In *Ancillary Justice*, there is a contrast between the plurality, omniscience, and nonhumanness of *Justice of Toren*/One Esk and the singularity, limitedness, and seeming humanness of Breq. While the portrayal of *Justice of Toren*/One Esk relies on unusual techniques, such as shifts in focalization within the same character, Breq's existence is presented through much more conventional means, and it is her past that makes her exceptional. In *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy*, other characters' perceptions and emotions become embedded in Breq's experience through variable internal focalization. Little by little, Breq learns to consider this new connection from more than just her own perspective and simultaneously to appreciate it in its own right, rather than only as an echo of her former existence. Thus, through a nonhuman ability she becomes more humanlike: this time not because she is alone, but because she is able to share something with others and make herself a place among them.

Even the structural elements of the narrative that are not literal takes on narratological concepts show a close entanglement of form and content. While the dual storyline structure in *Ancillary Justice* and Breq's unreliability are partly formal devices to create suspense, they also come together with plot points, Breq's characterization, and the development of her identity. The juxtaposition of *Justice of Toren*/One Esk's and Breq's experiences in *Ancillary Justice* emphasizes how the seemingly human existence is foreign to Breq, whereas her unreliability as a narrator makes her actually seem more human by showing her uncertain and fallible side. In addition, the series' omission of gender is connected to and enabled by how Breq experiences the storyworld, even if it is also a thought experiment on how a genderless language and culture might look like.

Through the use of Breq's perspective and the portrayal of the Radchaai society, the novels can make readers question the ways in which they view naturalized categories: not only gender, even if it is the most prominent example, but also the distinction between human and nonhuman and social categories in general. The boundary between human and nonhuman is negotiated in the character of Breq throughout the series, but in *Ancillary Mercy*, this boundary and the malleability of social categorizations are brought explicitly into discussion and given a final twist via Breq's redefinition of what it means to be a nonhuman artificial intelligence. Accordingly, the novels not only provide material for critical thinking on narratological concepts but also on such questions as to why we consider gender such an essential category and what it actually means to be human or a person. Therefore, they not only meet the definition of science fiction as a genre that literalizes metaphors, but also as "a literary form that function[s] to defamiliarize, critique, and/or satirize present-day reality through the projection of alternative worlds," as Rob Latham paraphrases Darko Suvin's influential definition (2). In other words, the series meets "*the necessary and sufficient conditions*" of science fiction, "*the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition*," as Suvin himself formulates his definition (7–8, emphasis original). This is so even if Suvin dismisses space opera as "SF retrogressing into fairytale" (8). Therefore, the *Imperial Radch* trilogy shows that a work of fiction can utilize space operatic premises and focus on interpersonal relationships and characters' identities, for example, rather than hard science as such, and still provide readers with cognitive challenges.

It is not only its readers that the trilogy challenges, however. Rather, through their literalization of narratological phenomena, the novels have the potential to shed new light on narratology itself. As Brian McHale maintains, such literalization "lays bare" the inner workings of narratological concepts (329). Especially when it comes to forms of

focalization, the novels include features that are sometimes difficult to account for using the established narrative theory, which often seems to be modeled on realist fiction. Thus, so far, such theory has not always taken into account phenomena that are possible in speculative fiction, which is not limited by the rules of the real world. For example, what I have called dual and complex focalization includes multiple simultaneous focalizers that are not just an experiencing and narrating self but separate characters. Furthermore, the forms of focalization employed in *Ancillary Sword* and *Ancillary Mercy* seem to form a gradual spectrum where the place of Breq and the other characters involved in it vary and cannot be defined by easily delineated categories. Moreover, the end of *Ancillary Mercy* demonstrates what a literal shift in focalization without a change of focalizer might look like. Thus, the novels show how flexible and complex a phenomenon focalization can be, and a comprehensive theory of focalization should take such versatility into account. In addition, the novels display how complicated notions of cognitive narratology, such as mind reading and intermental thought, really can be: they may blur the border between external and internal, so that mind reading becomes just a heightened form of interpreting the body, and include thought that seems to be shared by characters but is actually lodged in the protagonist's private consciousness.

The trilogy also partakes in the posthumanist discourse, and according to Pramod K. Nayar literature has in fact a significant role in "the radical rewriting of the idea of the human" (49). Colin Milburn also writes about science fiction in particular as exploring the posthuman condition. The Radch is in itself a posthuman society, but the Radchaai seem to be mainly advocates of transhumanism rather than critical posthumanism. Their genderless society has abolished the idea of the male as the paradigm of humanity, but, on the other hand, their culture is to a large extent based on colonialism and dehumanizes the colonized, just as European colonialism did according to Nayar (42–43). They also make a clear-cut division between the humans and the AIs, even if the differences between the two are not always that evident as, for example, a comparison between the many-bodied Anaander Mianaai and the AI characters shows. Thus, despite their disregard of gender, the Radchaai have a very narrow conception of the human.

In addition to portraying the Radchaai society, however, the novels also challenge its ideology. Thus, the trilogy not only depicts a transhumanist future but is an example of the kind of science fiction that Milburn describes as "concern[ing] the posthuman in a cultural or epistemic sense, discovering that 'human nature' is a tenuous social construct open to modification and revision" (524). Especially the end of *Ancillary Mercy* has clear parallels with the posthumanist discourse. The malleability of categories witnessed there

closely resembles the posthumanist notion of the human as a construct. Furthermore, the end of the trilogy portrays the first steps toward a new kind of relationship between the human and the AI: in the new republic, the AIs are no longer seen as tools or equipment but as equals to humans. Thus, the trilogy can be seen as pertaining to the movement away from human as the center of all things and even to the ethical concerns of posthumanism, the question of "how do we live with others on Earth?" (Nayar 48).

All in all, the *Imperial Radch* trilogy consists of three multifaceted novels that provide food for thought for non-specialist readers and narratologists alike. Thus, the novels are a clear illustration of how speculative fiction can help us view the world around us in general, and the field of narratology in particular, from a fresh perspective.

**Works Cited**

Attebery, Brian. *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction*. Routledge, 2002. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=685082&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 4th ed. U of Toronto P, 2017. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, http://search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1590574&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Bernaerts, Lars, et al. "The Storied Lives of Non-Human Narrators." *Narrative*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2014, pp. 68–93. *Academic Search Complete*, doi:10.1353/nar.2014.0002.

Bourke, Liz. "The Politics of Justice: Identity and Empire in Ann Leckie's Ancillary Trilogy." *Tor.com*, 19 Jan. 2016, www.tor.com/2016/01/19/the-politics-of-justice-identity-and-empire-in-ann-leckies-ancillary-trilogy/. Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

---. "A Shining Light for Space Opera: *Ancillary Mercy* by Ann Leckie." *Tor.com*, 15 Oct. 2015, www.tor.com/2015/10/15/book-reviews-ancillary-mercy-by-ann-leckie/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2020.

Clute, John, and David Langford. "Leckie, Ann." *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, edited by John Clute et al., updated 11 Apr. 2019, www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/leckie_ann. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton UP, 1978.

Eder, Jens, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider. "Characters in Fictional Worlds: An Introduction." *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*, edited by Jens Eder et al., De Gruyter, 2010, pp. 3–64. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/lib/helsinki-ebooks/detail.action?docID=669168.

Edmiston, William F. "Focalization and the First-Person Narrator: A Revision of the Theory." *Poetics Today* vol. 10, no. 4, 1989, pp. 729–44. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/1772808.

Fludernik, Monika. *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*. 1996. Routledge, 2005. *Dawsonera*, www-dawsonera-com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/abstract/9780203432501.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cornell UP, 1980.

---. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cornell UP, 1988.

Gymnich, Marion. "The Gender(ing) of Fictional Characters." *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*, edited by Jens Eder et al., De Gruyter, 2010, pp. 506–24. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/lib/helsinki-ebooks/detail.action?docID=669168.

Herman, David. *Basic Elements of Narrative*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/lib/helsinki-ebooks/detail.action?docID=437514.

Latham, Rob. "Introduction." *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*, edited by Rob Latham, Oxford UP, 2 Oct. 2014, pp. 1–19. *Oxford Handbooks Online*, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199838844.013.0001.

Leckie, Ann. *Ancillary Justice*. Orbit, 2013.

---. *Ancillary Mercy*. Orbit, 2015.

---. *Ancillary Sword*. Orbit, 2014.

---. "Frequently Asked Questions." *Ann Leckie*, annleckie.com/about/frequently-asked-questions/. Accessed 4 Mar. 2020.

---. "Q&A: Ann Leckie." Interview by Megan McArdle. *Library Journal*, vol. 139, no. 15, 15 Sep. 2014, p. 54. *Academic Search Complete*, search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=97918962&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

---. "She Commands Me and I Obey." 2014 Fund Drive Special, *Strange Horizons*, 14 Oct.–17 Nov. 2014, strangehorizons.com/fiction/she-commands-me-and-i-obey-part-1-of-2/, strangehorizons.com/fiction/she-commands-me-and-i-obey-part-2-of-2/. Accessed 1 Mar. 2020.

Le Guin, Ursula K. "Is Gender Necessary? Redux." *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, Gollancz, 1989, pp. 7–16.

McHale, Brian. "Speculative Fiction, or, Literal Narratology." *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Narrative Theories*, edited by Zara Dinnen and Robyn Warhol, Edinburgh UP, 2018, pp. 317–31.

Mendlesohn, Farah. "Introduction: Reading Science Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 1–12.

Milburn, Colin. “Posthumanism.” *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*, edited by Rob Latham, Oxford UP, 2 Oct. 2014, pp. 524–36. *Oxford Handbooks Online*, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199838844.013.0041.

Nayar, Pramod K. *Posthumanism*. Polity Press, 2014. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/lib/helsinki-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1729549.

Neumann, Birgit, and Ansgar Nünning. “Ways of Self-Making in (Fictional) Narrative: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Narrative and Identity.” *Narrative and Identity: Theoretical Approaches and Critical Analyses*, edited by Birgit Neumann et al., Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008, pp. 3–22.

Niederhoff, Burkhard. “Focalization.” *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, edited by Peter Hühn et al., Hamburg U, updated 24 Sep. 2013, www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/focalization. Accessed 8 Feb. 2020.

Palmer, Alan. *Fictional Minds*. U of Nebraska P, 2004. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=103473&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

---. *Social Minds in the Novel*. Ohio State UP, 2010.

Phelan, James. “Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of *Lolita*.” *Narrative* vol. 15, no. 2, 2007, pp. 222–38. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/nar.2007.0012.

---. *Living to Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*. Cornell UP, 2005.

---. “Why Narrators Can Be Focalizers—and Why It Matters.” *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, edited by Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman, State U of New York P, 2001, pp. 51–64.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. 2nd ed., Taylor & Francis, 2005. *Ellibs*, www-ellibslibrary-com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/book/0-203-44072-2.

Roine, Hanna-Riikka. *Imaginative, Immersive and Interactive Engagements: The Rhetoric of Worldbuilding in Contemporary Speculative Fiction*. 2016. Tampere UP, PhD dissertation. *Trepo*, urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-03-0195-8.

Scholes, Robert, Robert L. Kellogg, and James Phelan. *The Nature of Narrative*. Fortieth anniversary ed., rev. and expanded, Oxford UP, 2006. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.helsinki.fi/lib/helsinki-ebooks/detail.action?docID=665395.

Silver, Steven H. “Science Fiction & Fantasy 2014: The ‘Wonderful but Strange’ New World of Ann Leckie.” *Publishers Weekly*, 3 Oct. 2014, www.publishersweekly.com /pw/by-topic/authors/profiles/article/64258-science-fiction-fantasy-2014-the-wonderful-but-strange-new-world-of-ann-leckie.html. Accessed 24 Nov. 2019.

Stableford, Brian M., and David Langford. “Space Opera.” *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, edited by John Clute et al., updated 12 Aug. 2019, www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/space_opera. Accessed 22 Nov. 2019.

Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. Yale UP, 1979.

Zunshine, Lisa. *Strange Concepts and the Stories They Make Possible*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2008.